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The MAN WHO LAUGHED AT TIME

By ALEXANDER BLADE

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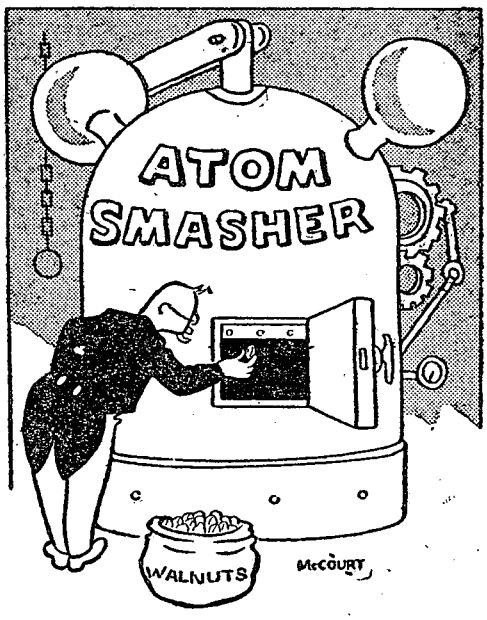
The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

OUR LEAD story for this month is by ever popular Alexander Blade. And the story is one that we predict you will remember for a very long time. As a matter of fact we think you'll read it more than once—it's that good. We're speaking about our cover story, "The Man Who Laughed At Time." As you may have surmised, this is a time story. But what you don't know now is that Blade has come up with a really terrific theme. We won't say anything more about it here except that a real treat is in store for you when you start reading it. Well—what are you waiting for!

WHENEVER a group of writers get together and start discussing their newest brain-children, one of the writers is sure to scoff at another and tell him he's wandering around in a semantic labyrinth. Those are mighty high sounding words and are intended to show a great deal of intelligence on the part of the person who uses them. Well, Rog Phillips happened to be in such a chin fest a short time back and somebody up and threw the fatal remark. Rog, without batting an eyelash turned and said: "You may be right. And you know, now that I think of it, semantics could be the basis for a very good science-fiction story. Thanks a lot for the tip." Well, your editor happened to be present also, and made a mental note of Rog's reply. We wanted to see just what Rog had in mind. It wasn't more than two weeks later when Rog sent in a manuscript entitled, "The Tangential Semanticist." What's the story all about? You'll find out when you start reading on page 38. Rog took a chiding remark and worked it into a really first class yarn. See if you don't agree.



ROBERT Moore Williams returns to the pages of FA after too long an absence with a swell novelette entitled, "Sons of the Prophet." This is the story of a strange man who called himself the prophet, and who had an entire city groveling at his feet with fear. There's plenty of suspense and spine-tingling action in this stf story, and we think you'll welcome Bob back to our pages with a big cheer.

"SEED OF Empire" is Guy Archette's latest offering for your reading pleasure. And as usual, Guy has come through with a swell story of future life on this planet, and we guarantee it will hold your interest right down to the last line.

LESTER BARCLAY said he had been reading all those accounts of flying saucers in the newspapers and just couldn't stand it any longer. Since nobody else had a reasonable explanation of them, he decided to try his own hand at the game. So, on page 104 you'll find his new story, "The Wee Men of Weehen," which is as neat a short as we've run across in months. We don't say that Lester's explanation of the flying saucers is the correct one, but then—who knows?

E. K. JARVIS contributes a short story entitled, "The Wheel From Space", which concerns a strange gadget that appeared out of nowhere, with seemingly no function to perform but spin. Unusual you say? Well, wait until you read the story. ....Warren Kastel finishes the issue with "Demonstration Flight", the story of a man who wanted to buy a rocket ship, took it up for a trial spin, and—but you'll find out what happened when you read the story. And we'll be seeing you again next issue. Until then.....WLH

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating
a scene from "The Man Who Laughed At Time."

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The MAN WHO LAUGHED AT TIME

By ALEXANDER BLADE

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The secrets of a man's life were an open book to Simon Toper — but the one thing he wanted to know, he didn't: who he was . . .

THEY ASKED him what his name was.

He lay on the bed for a long time and looked at them. Men and women in white uniforms. Serious faced doctors and sympathetic nurses. They stood around his bed and one of them asked him again.

"Don't you remember your name?"

He felt up around his head and the tightly bound bandages there. The very touch was strange. As strange as the faces that peered down at him. Even as strange as the very room he was in.

He was aware of everything. Keenly aware. It all seemed unusually new. And yet, somehow, everything seemed to be part of a pattern. An old pattern. A pattern that he knew very

Michaels lifted the gun and aimed it at the fat man. There was a blur of motion as he fired . . .

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well...

"Can't you try and remember? Don't you even know your name?"

He stared at the serious face of the doctor. His name. Did it really matter? Must he have one? He felt his face smile, and even that was an unusual sensation. Name. His name.

"Simon Toper. That's my name."

He heard his voice and was surprised. He was even more surprised at the way he had spoken. For he had given a name. He had told them that Simon Toper was his name. Who was Simon Toper? Why, it was him, of course. Why not? It was as good as any other name.

He could see them glance at each other and their serious faces looked somewhat relieved. They seemed happy that he had given them a name. To them the battle was won.

"You've been quite a sick man, Mr. Toper," one of them said gravely. "But the worst is over now. You're progressing very well. In a few days you'll be well enough to leave."

He looked at the doctor and felt a frown try to form under the bandages around his forehead.

"What happened to me? What am I doing here?"

Once again they all looked serious. They looked at him, then at each other. He saw one of them shake his head as if sadly.

"Don't you remember? Don't you know that as well as you knew your name?"

He saw that he had made a mistake in asking the question. But it had popped out before he had time to think about it. Ah, that was important. Thought was very important. *Thought meant the delicate balance.* ...Now where did he get that from? What had made him think that?

He looked back at their serious faces again. They were waiting for him to answer. What was it they wanted? Oh, yes, he had asked them a question and they had come back with one.

"I don't seem able to remember the details," he told them. "Maybe you can help me remember. What am I doing here?"

The doctor who had spoken before spoke again now.

"Of course, you're still confused. This is a hospital. You've been through a delicate brain surgery. You were an accident case. A truck, I believe—"

"Oh, no, doctor, it was a fall!" one of the nurses corrected the doctor.

He saw the momentary confusion on the doctor's face. Then one of the other white-coated men spoke up.

"You're both wrong. This man had a brain tumor. I remember distinctly when he was admitted..."

Another nurse shook her head and laughed.

"You're all quite mistaken. I was on duty when the ambulance brought him in. He was a gunshot case. The police record—"

"There isn't a police record on this patient!" a third doctor spoke in an irritated tone. "What's the matter with all of you? This man staggered in when I was on night duty. He was badly beaten, a brawl case!"

THERE WAS silence then. The two other doctors present who hadn't spoken merely looked at each other. And from the way they looked he knew that they had different versions to offer but were refraining from doing so.

It was all somehow humorous to him. In that moment he had ceased to be their patient. They were suddenly wondering themselves. Each of them knew that the other was wrong, but each seemed suddenly reticent to attempt to prove it.

"Doesn't anybody remember what

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happened to me?" he asked them the question. And he felt very smug about it. He had turned the tables on them. The very question they had asked him. And he knew he wouldn't get another answer. He also knew why.

There wasn't any!

He laughed in their faces then. He laughed loud and long. And as he laughed, one of the nurses stepped closer to his bed.

"You mustn't get upset—don't exert yourself—you might disturb the sutures..."

He stopped laughing then and looked at her. She looked very concerned. In a moment he knew she would look almost terrified. He knew why...

"Sutures? *What* sutures?" he asked her.

"Why, your brain operation..."

He shook his head and laughed again. Then he reached up with both of his hands and tugged at the bandages on his head.

"Stop that! Doctor—stop him!" the nurse cried out and turned to one of the doctors.

He could see the man stepping toward him, hands reaching out to pull his fingers from the bandages.

But he was too late. Suddenly the bandages were off.

He heard a gasp of astonishment from every one of them in the room.

He didn't have to look with their eyes to know that his head was normal. That his hair had not been shaved, that there were no sutures—that there had been no surgery performed on him...

"This is impossible!" one of the doctors gasped in an awed tone. "Why I performed the operation myself!"

"*You* performed the operation? Why you're crazy, man—*I* did!"

He saw their faces take on a sudden look of terror. And the doctor who had called the other one crazy suddenly started to back away from the bed. He new why he was backing away. And he saw the others start to back along with him. They were wondering if each of them was demented. He could see it in their eyes. And it made him laugh again.

"Nobody operated on me!" he shouted at them as he laughed. "Can't you all see that my head is normal?"

They could see. And what they saw made them want to get out of the room. They wanted to forget that they had ever been there.

One of them opened the door and left quickly. Then the others turned without speaking and quietly began to leave. He waited until only a nurse was left in the room. He called to her as she reached the door.

"Before you leave, would you mind bringing me my clothes?"

She paused at the door, looking at me with fear in her eyes. A fear of the unknown. But he smiled at her and then she slowly came back into the room.

She crossed to a closet and opened it. She pointed at the clothing that was hanging inside it. Then she crossed again to the door. But as she reached it she turned back to face him once more.

"Who are you?" she asked in a hushed voice.

He smiled at her and said, "Why, I'm Simon Toper. Don't you know?"

There was a tremor on her lips as she closed the door and left him alone in the room.

He lay there for awhile and looked at the closed door. He wondered what those men and women were thinking about now. He wondered if they would ever be able to think straight again.

He sighed and looked over to the closet. He could see the handsome suit hanging in there, and the other beside it. He knew he had to get up

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and get dressed. There was no reason for him to stay here any longer.

But to get dressed would take a little time. Not much, but a little.

He got out of bed and started to walk toward the closet, thinking about it.

But he didn't have to go there.

The suit was gone. So was the rest of the clothing.

He was dressed. He was standing in the middle of the room with the clothing on.

He looked at himself and felt surprised. Now that was strange... He didn't remember getting dressed... He merely thought it would take a little time to do it. Ah...of course. He *thought* it would take a little time.

Was that unusual? He wasn't sure. Maybe...

HARRY BORDEN sat in his private office and stared moodily at the stack of papers on top of his desk. Those papers were the result of a week's intensive investigation. An investigation that he as District Attorney, was duty bound to resolve into an airtight case that would send Nancy Drake to the electric chair for the murder of her employer, James Pratt.

Nancy Drake. He rolled the girl's name over in his mind. And as he thought of her, he saw her face before him again. Young, sweet, innocent. Not the face of a murderess, not the face of a person even remotely connected with crime.

And yet Nancy Drake had killed.

The facts said so.

The facts.

He mulled those over too. They were all contained in the papers on his desk. Facts that had been repeated again and again in cross questioning. They were all there. Facts that a clever district attorney could utilize to send a beautiful young girl to the chair.

Harry Borden knew he was clever. He had become district attorney because he was clever. Wise in the ways of crime. Clever in the means of solving them. Relentless in his own duty to uphold the law. He could take the facts in those papers and go into court with his case against the girl. He could override the defense counsel's objections of circumstantial evidence. Circumstantial?

Borden frowned as he thought about the facts. What did they add up to? Nancy Drake had been the secretary of James Pratt. Pratt was one of the leading stock brokers in the city. Pratt had been found dead with a .38 slug in his head. Pratt who had had no known enemies. A solid substantial citizen. A man who the city looked up to, respected. Pratt had been killed. Nancy Drake?

The girl had shown genuine shock when she learned of Pratt's death. And for awhile he had been sure she was innocent. But that was before the police had found a possible motive to connect her with the crime. He remembered how he had questioned her himself. In this very office. She had been sitting in front of his desk. In the chair that was now empty before him. Sitting there with a frightened look in her warm blue eyes.

He had tried to be gentle with her. For she had looked at him with a mute appeal. An appeal of confused fear. A look that made her features pale, and more beautiful still...

"I want you to have confidence in me, Miss Drake," he told her. And he smiled at her, warmly genuinely. And she responded with a wan brightness in her eyes.

"As you know I am the district attorney," he went on. "And right away I want to assure you that as district attorney it is just as much my job to

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prosecute the guilty as it is to protect the innocent. If you are guilty I will know it and nothing you can do to hide the facts will stop me. If you are innocent, and the facts convince me that you are, then I will do everything in my power to protect you. Do you understand?"

She nodded slowly, and some of the tension left her face.

"Yes...I understand."

"Good. I want you to remember that. I have you in my office now to help me decide which you are—innocent or guilty To do that I will want your complete cooperation, a truthful answer to every question I ask you."

"I'll do my best..." she responded softly, and he saw her straighten in her chair as she waited for his first question.

"All right. Now Miss Drake, you were in James Pratt's employ?"

"Yes. I was his secretary."

"You worked for him how long?"

"Two years."

"Did he have any other employee?"

"No. Just me."

"You were in the office the day he was murdered?'

HE SAW her wince at the word, and for a moment her lips trembled. Then she looked straight at him and replied.

"Yes...I was there."

"All day?"

"No. Mr. Pratt told me I could leave at three o'clock."

"Was that unusual?"

"Yes:..But he said he didn't want to be disturbed. He was with two clients."

"Who were they?"

The girl frowned. And for a moment confusion shown on her face. Then she answered.

"I, I don't know. They didn't give their names..."

"You said they were clients?"

"...Mr. Pratt said they were."

"You knew all of his clients personally?"

"Not all of them. Most of them."

"You had never seen these two men before then?"

"No..."

He paused and studied her face. He knew that the questions had all been routine up until that moment. Questions that the police had asked her over and over. And always the same answers. And now the important questions. The questions that would bring answers to decide her guilt...

"Miss Drake, did you ever see James Pratt outside office hours?"

She stared at him and her face flushed for a moment.

"I, I don't know exactly what you mean."

"I mean, Miss Drake, did you ever see James Pratt socially—say, just the two of you?"

The flush on her face deepened.

"...Yes. We had dinner a few times..."

"Pratt was a married man?"

"...He was."

"Was he in love with you?"

Her face was very red then. But not with embarrassment he saw. With sudden anger. And it showed in her voice as she replied.

"I don't see what all this has to do with his death! Why must you try and make scandal. Do you think his wife would want it? Hasn't she suffered enough?"

There was a coolness to his voice as he told her:

"James Pratt was the one who suffered. He died."

He saw her features relax under the bite of his words, and the anger faded from her face.

"Yes...I suppose you're right. I'm sorry."

He nodded. "I'll repeat the question. Was he in love with you?"

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"He—he said he was..."

"Were you in love with him?"

"No!"

Her voice held a tense emotion in it and her eyes pleaded with him. He forced himself to return her gaze steadily, coolly.

"He wanted to marry you?"

"Yes—but I told him I didn't care for him—I told him that I wouldn't see him again..."

"Did you?"

"No—not socially."

"If what you've said is true, why didn't you quit your job and completely sever relations with him?"

"I told him I was quitting. But he pleaded with me to remain until he had time enough to find someone to take my place. That was just a few weeks before..."

"Before he was shot to death in his office. Is that what you were going to say?"

"Yes..."

BORDEN took a deep breath then brought up the final group of questions.

"On that day, it was June 5th, you say that two clients came to see Pratt, and that shortly afterward he called you into his office and told you to take the rest of the day off. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"I didn't have anything to do at the time, so I went window shopping along the avenue."

"Did you meet anyone you knew?"

"...No."

That had been the key question. The one he had been waiting to ask. For if she had answered yes, and been able to prove she was with someone else during that time, she might have had a chance. At least an alibi that might stand up. But now she admitted she had none.

As he looked at her he knew that she was reading the same thing in his eyes. And he could see the look of defeat in hers. Defeat and hopelessness. And in that moment he hated to do what he must do next. For now he had to theorize, show her what the law said could have happened...

"Miss Drake, is it possible that before you left the office that afternoon, that you and James Pratt had a violent argument? Is it possible that he never had any visitors? Visitors who you can't even name? Is it possible that during that argument you struggled with him and shot him? And is it not also possible that you left the office then and got rid of the murder weapon? Would that not account for your lack of an alibi? Isn't it possible, Miss Drake that you shot and killed James Pratt just as I have outlined?"

He had bitten out each question with a sharp and caustic tone. But even as he spoke he knew deep within him that somehow he didn't believe the accusations he hurled at her.

"No! It's not true! I swear it's not! I've told you everything I know! What more can I say? I didn't kill him! I didn't kill him!"

Her voice rose hysterically and then she was sobbing, her head bent, her face hidden in a white handkerchief.

He sat quietly and hated himself while she sobbed. And then finally she raised her head and looked at him with trembling lips. There was a haunting accusation in her eyes as she looked at him.

"You said you would protect me if I were innocent! But you've already decided I'm guilty! I've told you the truth and you don't believe me!"

He couldn't answer her. There was no answer to give her that she would understand. He watched as she was led away...

And now he sat and thought about

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it. That first meeting with Nancy Drake. The first of many. And all had been the same, the same questions. The same answers. The same result:

He was district attorney. A man had been killed. Nancy Drake was the only suspect. Nancy Drake had a motive. A motive tied up in a jealous love affair. A motive that he could send her to the chair with.

But he knew he didn't want to. For he kept seeing her face. Sweet, innocent. Not the face of a murderess...

He remembered how he had tried to bargain with her. If she would admit that she killed Pratt in a struggle... He knew she would have had a chance in court with a plea of self defense. But she refused to admit anything. She hadn't killed Pratt. She kept saying it.

HE LOOKED at the papers on his desk. And a sigh left his lips. For he knew that the time for action was close now. The court date was set and he would have to prosecute.

Nancy Drake had been indicted for murder.

He would have to get up in court and ask the supreme penalty.

He would have to demand that she be sent to the electric chair.

Nancy Drake...

He saw her warm eyes again. And he knew that the papers on his desk were wrong. They had to be wrong! She hadn't killed. She couldn't kill... But that was his case. He hated it, but that was it. There were no other suspects. Only two hypothetical clients. And Nancy Drake...

"Mr. Borden. Are you busy?"

Harry Borden snapped up in his chair at the sound of his secretary's voice coming from the intercom on his desk. He flipped a switch.

"What is it, Miss Dodd?"

"There's a Mr. Toper to see you, sir. A Mr. Simon Toper."

Borden frowned. Toper? He didn't know any Simon Toper.

"I'm very busy, Miss Dodd, I—"

"He says it's very important, sir. He says he wants to see you about the Drake case."

The frown left Borden's face and surprise took its place. He stared at the intercom for a moment, then said:

"Send him in."

He flicked off the switch and sat back in his chair, his eyes on the door. Toper? Simon Toper? What would he want—what could he know about the Drake case? And then suddenly his eyes lighted. Toper! Now he had placed the name. The newspapers...

The door opened and a short man entered the room. Borden's eyes took him in with an experienced glance. He was inclined to stoutness, well dressed in a pin-stripe tweed suit. There was an ingratiating smile on his full face, and his eyes seemed to sparkle with some hidden amusement.

"Mr. Toper?"

The fat man nodded and moved into the room, closing the door behind him.

"Yes, Mr. Borden. I trust I'm not inconveniencing you?"

Borden shook his head.

"Not at all. Please sit down."

He waited until the fat man had seated himself in front of the desk.

"My secretary informed me that you wished to see me about the Drake Case."

"That's right," Toper continued to smile. "I thought maybe I could be some help to you.'

Borden was watching the man closely, his mind speeding rapidly, placing the face he was now confronted with. He remembered reading about Toper in the tabloids. He hadn't paid much attention to it, but he had scanned the stories in the papers. What had they been? Oh, yes, some-

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thing about the uncanny insight of this man, almost prophetic, in predicting race results and stock market quotations. The papers had attributed an almost magical significance to the man. Sensationalism, of course.

Borden frowned slightly as he stared at the fat man.

"Help me? You mean you have some information on the case that the police haven't discovered?"

Toper looked at him mildly.

"Oh, no, I have no knowledge of the case whatsoever. That is, nothing but what I read in the papers."

THE FROWN left Borden's face and when he spoke his voice was abrupt.

"Then I can't possibly see what help you can be. I'm sorry, but I'm really very busy—"

Toper laughed.

"Oh come now, Borden, I didn't come here in jest. I meant what I said. I'd like to help you on this case."

A faint trace of irritation showed on Borden's features.

"Look, here, sir, if this is some new publicity stunt of yours—"

"Ah," Toper sighed humorously. "I see you've heard about me."

Borden shrugged. "I've seen your writeups, yes. And that's just what I mean. If you've come here for more publicity—"

"But I have read the papers too, Mr. Borden. And what is more important, I have seen Nancy Drake's photograph in the papers. I do not believe she is guilty of murder. It isn't in her face..."

Borden sighed patiently. He knew now that he had made a mistake in letting this man in.

"That's very gratifying, Mr. Toper. And of course, you're entitled to your opinion. But what is in Nancy Drake's face is not, I assure you, going to be the factor which will decide her guilt or innocence. Now, if you will pardon me..."

But Toper made no move to rise. Instead he smiled at Borden.

"As I said, Borden, I'm here to offer my services to you. Of course, not really to you, but to Miss Drake."

Borden sat back in his chair resignedly. It was apparent that the fat man had no intention of leaving until he made his point clear, whatever it might be. He decided to see just what Toper had on his mind. He was, in fact, suddenly curious.

"And just what might your services be?" Borden asked.

Toper continued to smile.

"As you may have read in the papers did not state, did not, in fact, tell coming events. But what the papers did not state, did not, in fact, know about, is that I can also relate under the proper circumstances just what occurred in the past."

There was a puzzled look on Borden's face.

"I don't see—"

"If you will allow me to clarify," the fat man continued. "As I said, I can view the past, just as I view the future. And since there is somewhat of a mystery surrounding the intimate details of the Drake case, I thought you might like to know just what did happen in Pratt's office that day."

Borden straightened in his chair and his composure was now strained.

"Look here, Toper, this is a murder case, and a serious business. It has no place for frauds and publicity seekers. You force me to be more definite. I'm asking you to leave."

For the first time the smile faded from the fat man's face. In its place was a studied look of tolerance.

"You call me a fraud? And what if I were to prove to you that I can do just as I say?"

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"That's impossible."

"Is it? Take yourself for example. You have never seen me before. There is no possible way I could know of your activities of, shall we say, the past half hour. What if I were to tell you everything you did during the past half hour? Would you believe me then?"

BORDEN smiled for the first time. The fat man had made a mistake. He had laid his own trap. What he said he could do was impossible, he knew. And he could easily prove it. For he knew that during the past half hour he had done nothing but sit and stare at the papers on his desk. He had done nothing but a lot of thinking. Toper didn't know that. And Borden knew he could now make a fool out of the man to his face.

"Very well, Mr. Toper. I'll challenge you to tell me every single thing I've done for the past half hour. If you can I shall be more than glad to speak to you further."

Toper smiled and nodded.

"I shall do my best. It will only take a few moments..."

The fat man's voice trailed off, and Borden saw him half close his eyes. Then, as he watched, a strange thing seemed to take place. Borden could not explain it, unless it was a sudden trauma of his eyes. For the figure of Simon Toper, sitting in the chair before him, suddenly seemed to waver, seemed to be enveloped in some scintillating aura.

For a long moment the very features of the fat man were indistinct. Were, in fact, almost transparent. And through them, Borden had the sudden impression that he could see the very wall behind Toper's head.

It was uncanny. It shook Borden as nothing had ever done. He raised his hand and rubbed his eyes, closing them for a fraction of a second.

When he opened them again the fat man was sitting placidly, staring at him, a smile pulling at the corners of his flacid mouth.

"You have spent a singularly uninspiring half hour, Mr. Borden. You have done nothing but sit and stare at those papers on your desk."

Borden was aware that his mouth had dropped open. He was also aware that his self assurance had been shaken. He had decided that this man was a fraud, that what he had seen in the papers concerning him was nothing more than an attempt at sensationalism. He knew it was impossible for any man to foresee the future, let alone the past. And now he was facing this strange man. This Simon Toper. And Toper had told him simply, but definitely, exactly what he had done in the privacy of his office during the past half hour. It was weird. It was incredible—but it was true...

"You seem unduly surprised, Mr. Borden," Toper said in what seemed to be apparent amusement. "Tell me, am I not correct?"

Borden nodded slowly. And now he looked at the fat man with a touch of near respect.

"You are correct. And I will be frank in admitting that I am shocked —amazed. You couldn't have guessed..."

"That is also correct. I could not have guessed. I saw, Mr. Borden. I saw you as plainly as I see you this moment. Now will you believe me? I will extend my offer once again to help in the Drake case."

Borden's face was a mask in that moment. But his thoughts were moving with a rapidity that startled him. For he was thinking, hoping desperately. If what this strange man claimed were true, then he might indeed be able to envision what had occurred in Pratt's office that day.

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And if he could...

"You have told me enough to temper my judgment, Mr. Toper. I must admit frankly that I am still skeptical, but..."

"Then you will allow me to help?"

"I must first of all have your assurance that this will not be utilized as a publicity stunt. You understand my position..." Borden said slowly. And he saw by Toper's knowing smile that the fat man understood what he had meant. If news of an experiment like this were to leak out he would be laughed from office.

"Of course. You have my word. Now, if you care to go to Pratt's office..."

Borden looked surprised.

"Why can't you do it here?"

The fat man's eyes were suddenly veiled in a thoughtful look.

"As I said before, I can visualize the past and future, under certain conditions. The exact locality is one of those conditions..."

"I see..." Borden said thoughtfully. "All right, I'll take you over there myself."

THE MANAGEMENT of the Central Exchange Building had supplied a key to Pratt's office, at Borden's request. Now he opened the door and stepped inside, the fat man following him.

The reception room was plain, but adequately furnished. There were the usual filing cabinets, a large secretarial desk, a divan for visitors, and a closed door on the far side of the room leading into Pratt's private office.

Borden crossed the room and opened the door.

This room was more lavishly furnished. There was a rich carpet, a magnificent mahogany desk, and matching furniture in dark leather. Borden motioned toward the desk.

"Pratt's body was found slumped over the desk. He died in his chair."

Simon Toper followed Borden's gaze, and he slowly nodded. And as Borden looked closely at the man, he saw an eagerness on his features. Almost an expectancy.

"It will only take a moment..."

And as the words left Toper's lips, Borden saw the same uncanny transformation take place that he had witnessed in his own office. And now he was sure that it was not a fault of his eyes. For he saw the fat man's body waver, seem to shimmer with an aura...

And to Simon Toper, the room suddenly changed. It was such a simple matter. All he had to do was think. *The delicate balance...* And as he thought, he wondered again, as he had wondered months before in the hospital room. Where had the thought come from? Why?...

He was staring at the same desk. The same desk in the same room. And yet somehow the room was different.

There were three men in it.

One of them sat behind the desk. Two were standing in front of it.

The man behind the desk was looking at the two standing men with a sudden fear. He was staring at one of them in particular. A tall man. A man with hawkish features and thin, bloodless lips. This man was speaking in cold, methodical tones.

"Call in your secretary, Pratt. Tell her she can have the rest of the day off."

Pratt hesitated. He licked his lips nervously. Then the second man, shorter, with a wizened face and sharp beady eyes spoke.

"Do what the boss says. Al Michaels wants it nice and private, see?"

Michaels nodded in agreement.

"That's right. I want it nice and private. And just in case you don't understand, Weber, here, has a gun

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in his pocket."

Pratt swallowed nervously but reached out and switched on the intercom on his desk.

"Miss Drake. Will you come in a moment?"

The door opened and a trim girl entered the room. There was a friendly smile on her face and in her eyes as she walked up to Pratt's desk.

"Yes Mr. Pratt?"

"Miss Drake, I'll be tied up for some time...You can have the rest of the day off."

The girl stared from Pratt to the two men standing in front of the desk. There was a surprised questioning in her eyes, but as she looked back at Pratt, she nodded.

"Thank you, Mr. Pratt. Are you sure it will be all right?"

Pratt nodded urgently.

"Yes. Now please go."

The girl turned and left the room.

THE TWO men waited for long moments until they heard the outer door of the reception room close. Then the tall, man, Michaels, spoke.

"Now we can get down to business. You know why I'm here, Pratt?"

"I, I'm naturally surprised..."

"Surprised?" the tall man laughed. "You shouldn't be. Did you think you could really blackmail me and get away with it?"

"You're wrong!" Pratt protested. "I—"

"Wrong? Come, come Pratt, it's too late for that. You know who I am. There is no need for further secrets now, is there? I head what you would term the 'underworld' in this city. I am the man behind the scenes, the head of the syndicates. I also happen to hold large blocs of stock in completely reputable corporations. You should know that since you obtained them for me. And now you threaten to reveal this information to the stock exchange which would in turn cause my holdings to become practically worthless—unless I pay you the modest sum of one hundred thousand dollars. Am I stating the facts accurately?"

Pratt licked his lips. They seemed dry and cracked as his tongue flicked over them.

"I only thought that since we're so closely allied—"

"Allied? You and I? You flatter yourself. I hired you to secure the stocks I wanted. Nothing else. You took it on yourself to investigate me and find out what you now know. The money you request will seal your lips?"

Sudden hope shown in Pratt's eyes.

"It's purely a financial transaction. Nothing else, really..."

"Of course. But a transaction that I fortunately am not in a position to have to consummate. However, I have an alternative solution."

Pratt frowned. "What?..."

The tall man turned his eyes to the shorter man beside him.

"Weber here. He handles a certain portion of my affairs. Affairs like yours. He is the alternative I spoke of. Since the question at hand is your proposed silence on certain matters pertaining to myself, Weber will make certain of that silence. And no financial transaction will be necessary."

The frown on Pratt's forehead deepened. But along with it the nervous look in his eyes increased.

"I don't understand..."

Weber gave a short laugh. And suddenly his hand came out of his coat pocket and he was holding a snub-nosed automatic in it.

"It's just like the boss says, Pratt. I'm going to help you keep your mouth shut—for good."

And as he said it the gun in his hand pointed at Pratt's head.

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"No! Don't! For God's sake don't! I swear—"

His voice was drowned out in the dull flat report of the gun.

A black hole appeared in Pratt's head and for a single instant his eyes showed shocked surprise.

Then he slumped across the desk and the black hole became a well of swelling red.

The two men looked at him for a long moment. Then the tall man sighed.

"I really dislike violence, Weber. But sometimes it's extremely necessary."

Weber laughed, a hoarse, grating laugh.

"Yeh, boss. Nice shot, huh? He didn't know what hit him."

The tall man pulled on a pair of gloves and walked to the door. He opened it.

And they left the room, closing the door behind them.

HARRY BORDEN saw the fat man's body in the shimmering haze. Felt the seconds tick by, and then suddenly the fat man ceased to shimmer. And Borden was staring at him with fascinated eyes.

"You've—seen?..."

Borden heard his own voice come tensely. And he knew that against his will he was believing in this strange person. That somehow he might be able to save Nancy Drake from the penalty he must exact as a representative of the state. He hoped...

Toper's face was a smiling wreath. His eyes were sparkling with an evident pleasure.

"You may calm yourself, Mr. Borden. Yes, I saw what occurred. And I can assure you that Miss Pratt did not commit any crime. She left the office as Pratt ordered her to. And there were two men with him. One of those men shot Pratt in the head."

Near disbelief shown in Borden's eyes as he stared at Toper.

"But who—what happened?"

"A man called Al Michaels and his henchman, Weber are the ones you should be prosecuting. Pratt was trying to blackmail Michaels. Michaels didn't want to cooperate. So he had Weber shoot him. It was over some transaction."

"Al Michaels?" Consternation edged Borden's voice. "But he's the head of the vice syndicate!"

"Exactly. He admitted as much just before Pratt was killed. So you see, Miss Drake is not guilty."

Borden's head was in a whirl. He couldn't believe what he had heard. And yet, he knew somehow, that what the fat man said must be the truth. Al Michaels. A stock transaction. Blackmail attempted by Pratt. Of course! It was possible!

But then abruptly he sobered. For now that the sudden startling realization of what might have occurred had been revealed through Simon Toper, the crushing fact that it would be impossible to prove became more than apparent to him.

"I don't know if what you say is the truth," Borden said slowly, "but I'm not saying I don't believe you either. The fact remains that even knowing what you have told me, I can do nothing. If Al Michaels is at the bottom of this murder, then Nancy Drake is doomed—because Michaels is too powerful, he controls too many people. And even if that were not the case, we have no proof..."

There was an angry helplessness in Borden's voice as he spoke. For inwardly he knew that he had pinned everything on what Simon Toper had said. He knew now that his feelings for Nancy Drake were not merely a sympathetic fancy. They went deeper than that. Deeper than the assurance that had brooded inside him that

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she was innocent. And now that he had found something to cling to, something that would show that she was indeed innocent, he knew just as well that it would be impossible to prove it.

His eyes now rested on the smiling face of Simon Toper. And as he stared at the man he felt a sudden resentment toward him. And something else. Questions that rose in his mind. Questions that shook him, made him feel small and uncertain of himself.

Who was this Simon Toper? What sort of man was it who could breach the locked doors of time? Who stood before him even now—laughing...

And as he thought, he heard Simon Toper speaking.

"I understand what you mean. It does seem impossible to prove. It is my word against his, unless—"

The fat man's voice trailed off and once again his eyes half closed in that same thoughtful look that Borden had seen on his face in his own office. Then Toper was looking at him again.

"You will hear from me, Mr. Borden. And in the meantime you may go to Miss Drake and tell her not to worry."

Borden watched the fat man turn toward the door.

"Wait! What can you do? Where are you going?"

Toper turned, smiling.

"I'm going to see Al Michaels."

"Wait!" Borden called again as the fat man turned.

"Yes?"

Borden fumbled for words. He didn't know how to say it, what he was thinking.

"Who are you? What *are* you?"

A laugh slipped from the fat man's lips. But then suddenly the laugh faded away and Borden thought he saw a puzzled look in the fat man's eyes. Then even that was gone and the enigmatic smile took its place.

"Why, I'm Simon Toper. Don't you know?"

THE PENTHOUSE apartment was the last word in lavish appointment. Al Michaels sat in his study, behind his teakwood desk, staring through the partly open door into the huge living room beyond. There was a satisfied look on Michaels' face as he stared through that door and into the room beyond. The oriental rugs, the custom built furniture, the sharp decor of the green walls and ceiling. It was rich, warmly plush, everything he wanted.

He could hear the soft voices of some of his men in that living room, voices betting and raising in a poker game. He heard the sharp exclaim of Weber as his hand won a pot.

Michaels smiled.

Then he picked up the afternoon paper and scanned the front page. There it was. The Drake case. The latest story, a resume, actually of what had been printed many times before. The case would be going into court very shortly. And once there, the girl would be convicted.

He saw mention again of the two "clients" the girl maintained had been with Pratt when she left. And he smiled. It was too bad. She was even a beautiful girl. And Michaels liked beautiful things. Too bad. If circumstances had been different he might have done something for her. But it was better this way. Somebody had to pay. Somebody always had to pay. And Michaels knew his present position had been gained and would be maintained by making peo ple pay for him.

Yes, she was a beautiful girl. He wondered if she would still be beautiful when they shaved her long dark tresses and placed her in the chair. He wondered if she would hold any

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trace of beauty when the high voltage shot through her body.

He sighed.

He looked up from the paper he was reading as a buzzer sounded at the front of the apartment. He heard Weber call that he would get it and heard a chair being shoved back.

He began to read the paper idly, again, but looked up from it a moment later as Weber suddenly came into the study.

"Boss, there's a guy named Toper out there. Wants to see you."

Michaels frowned at the name. Then he looked at Weber's face. And he saw the wizened little gunman licking his lips nervously.

"Toper? I don't know any Toper. Who is he?"

"He says his name is Simon Toper. I think you better see him, boss."

"Simon Toper?" Michaels ran the name around on his tongue. Then his face cleared. He remembered the name now. He had followed the news stories about this man with considerable interest. He had even been at the track when Toper had made some predictions of the races. And he had laughed because he knew that the race was fixed for another horse. But then he had stopped laughing when the horse Toper had predicted would win, did win. Toper. Simon Toper.

"What do you mean, I better see him?" Michaels asked curiously.

Weber moved his feet closer to the desk uneasily.

"He says he wants to talk to you about the Drake dame. —And boss, he knew my name—he called me Weber."

Michaels' eyebrows shot up in a swift arch.

"Oh? Well that's very interesting. Send him in, Weber."

Weber nodded and turned to go. Then he stopped.

"Maybe I better stay with you, huh, boss?"

Michaels nodded.

"Bring him in."

Weber turned and shuffled from the room, his feet moving nervously as he went. Moments later he was back, holding the door open and Michaels saw a fat man with a smiling face walk in.

"I'm Al Michaels. You wished to see me?"

Toper nodded, looking at Weber.

"Yes. But I would prefer to talk to you alone. At least for the present. You can tell Weber to wait outside with the others. He might just as well return to his poker game."

THERE WAS a lilting humor in the fat man's voice, and something else. Michaels couldn't be sure just what it was. But he motioned to Weber.

"Close the door behind you. I'll speak to Mr. Toper alone."

Weber didn't want to go, Michaels could tell from the look on his face. But the wizened gunman finally shrugged and left the room, closing the door.

"I've heard about you, Toper. You're quite an interesting person. I don't know why I didn't look you up before. I was out at the track one day when you predicted a race. I had a good laugh for awhile, knowing that the race was fixed and you couldn't possibly be right." He smiled. "But you *were* right. Yes, I should have looked you up before."

Toper continued to smile as Michaels motioned him to a chair in front of the desk. The fat man sat down and shook his head.

"I didn't come here to talk about a race," he said.

Michaels' face sobered and a thoughtful look entered his eyes.

"Weber did mention that you came about something—he mentioned the

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Drake Case?..."

"That's right."

"And just what interest should I have in the Drake affair?"

The fat man shrugged lightly.

"Quite a bit, since you and Weber were the clients Nancy Drake told the police about."

There was a moment of tense silence. Michaels' eyes grew closer, and there was a wary look in them now.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, Toper. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, but I think you do. Really, there's no use in pretending ignorance to me. You were both seen in Pratt's office."

A flicker of fear opened Michael's eyes wide for a brief instant. Then they were half closed again, wary, thoughtful.

"Seen? By who?"

"By me, of course."

Michaels straightened in his chair.

"You?" Michaels said in astonishment. He was thinking rapidly. He and Weber had come in through a rear entrance to the building. They had taken the stairway, avoiding the elevators. And they had met no one. They had seen no one.

"Yes. I was in the office when you accused Pratt of trying to blackmail you. I heard you tell Weber to silence him. And I saw Weber pull a gun from his pocket and shoot Pratt in the head. Are you satisfied?"

The wary look was gone from Michaels' face now. In its place was a shocked fear. A look of disbelief. But more than anything else, fear.

"How could you know that?" Michaels' voice came hoarsely.

Toper continued to smile.

"Why I merely thought about it. And, of course, since time means nothing to me, why, I was there—with you."

Michaels heard the words dimly. But he did not understand them. Not until he remembered who he was talking to. A man who had been written up in the papers as some freak guesser who seemed to have an almost psychic insight into time. But what he had just heard was not guesswork. It was fact. Fact that nobody but he and Weber knew about. Not even the rest of his men were aware of the true facts. And yet this strange, fat, smiling man knew. Knew every intimate detail. And Michaels became crushingly aware that what this Simon Toper knew could put him in a precarious position.

He leaned forward casually, trying to keep his face calm. He reached for a cigarette in an open box on the desk top and with his other hand opened a side drawer of the desk. When his hand came up from the drawer he was holding a gun.

HE POINTED the weapon at the fat man, and Toper slowly rose to his feet. Michaels smiled then. A thin, confident smile.

"You seem to have a quite remarkable talent, Toper. And I'm not going to say you don't have your facts right. Because between the two of us we know that would be quite futile, don't we? But while you seem to be smart in one way, you are equally a fool in another. Do you think that I would be just as much a fool and allow you to leave here alive?"

The smile had not faded from the fat man's face. If anything, it was wider, his eyes lit more intensely by an inner amusement.

"You think you can kill me?"

Michaels nodded.

"I not only think, Toper, I'm going to. And, don't worry about me not being able to get away with it. It will be a simple matter for some of my boys to dump your body in an out-of-

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the-way place. Say, the river, after a fifty pound concrete block has been wired to your ankles?"

Toper sighed.

"I assure you it's a futile effort on your part. I have only to think—"

The fat man's words ended abruptly as he saw the finger of Michaels tighten on the trigger of his gun.

In the same instant there was a dull, flat report.

The bullet only had to travel a few feet. It would take only the minutest part of a second for it to travel that distance and strike the fat man's heart. Michaels knew that. He also knew that Toper could not possibly jump out of the way in time. There wasn't time enough. Even as the gun exploded in his hand he knew that Toper would be falling dead to the floor.

But Toper didn't fall.

The bullet never struck him. It sped straight toward his heart, but it never struck him.

Toper wasn't there.

Michaels saw it happen vaguely.

He saw the flash of his gun. And he saw something else. He saw the figure of the fat man seem to shimmer. An aura seemed to envelope him, and there was a twisting, swirling movement sideways too fast for his eyes to follow.

And Toper had vanished.

Even as the slug crashed into the far wall of the room the fat man disappeared.

Michaels stared in shocked awe. And the gun fell from his suddenly trembling fingers to the top of the desk.

He could hear the shouts from the outer room and the scrape of chairs being thrown back. He heard feet start to run toward his closed study door.

"I'm over here, Michaels. I'm right beside you."

Michaels' eyes switched to his left and he stared in disbelief at the figure of Simon Toper, standing a few feet away from him at the side of the desk!

And then the door of the study burst open and Weber dashed into the room, a gun in his hand. Behind him came three more men.

"Boss! What happened? You all right?"

Weber's eyes stared nervously from Michaels to Toper and back to Michaels.

The fat man laughed.

"It was an accident, Weber. Mr. Michaels discharged his gun accidentally. Isn't that right, Michaels?"

The tall man straightened slowly in his chair. His mind was still too dazed to grasp what had occurred. He heard the fat man laugh again.

"Tell them, Michaels. They seem to be worried."

Michaels looked slowly at Weber.

"....It was an accident. I'm all right...."

"Boss, shall I take care of this guy, huh, boss?"

"Get out!" Michaels shouted suddenly. A pentup anger was suddenly released. All of the frustration he felt that he could not take out on Toper he lashed in the words at Weber.

And Weber backed away toward the door in fear. He saw the look on Michaels' face and he nodded hastily.

"O.K., boss. Sure, boss, anything you say...."

And a moment later the door closed again.

MICHAELS looked at Toper and felt his fingers trembling. His eyes glanced down at the gun on the desk top and then back to the smiling face of the fat man.

"You can't be alive! There wasn't time for you to move!..."

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Toper moved in front of the desk again. He stood there looking down at the blanched features of Al Michaels.

"Exactly, Michaels, there wasn't time enough to move. And that's just it. There simply wasn't time..."

"But how? *How?...*" Michaels' voice was a mixture of awe and fear.

"It's really very simple. At least it is to me... You see, it took time for your bullet to reach me. And of course, time means nothing to me... So I just wasn't there. I was where I would have been thirty seconds later. Standing by the side of your desk. So you see, Michaels, it was just as I said—you can't kill me."

Fear was a crawling thing in Al Michaels' eyes then. He stared at the fat man as he might have stared at some rearing reptile, set to strike at him as he sat chained behind his desk. Only he wasn't chained. And the fat man was not a reptile. But the same fear was in his eyes.

"What do you want? Money? I'll give you anything you ask..."

Toper shook his head.

"Money I can get anytime I want it. Have you forgotten the races? No, Michaels, I don't want your money. There's only one thing I want from you. Weber killed James Pratt. An innocent girl is accused of that crime and she will be convicted unless the real killer is apprehended. You and I know who the real killer is. Weber must confess."

"Confess?" Michaels uttered the word hoarsely. "But that would mean that I would be involved..."

"An innocent girl is involved. The district attorney is waiting to hear from me. I'm here to get that confession." The fear deepened in Michaels' eyes. "He knows—about this?"

Toper nodded.

"Of course, I told him. But he felt he had no proof and that you were too powerful to be touched, so I decided to get the evidence myself."

As the words of the fat man reached him, Michaels suddenly sat back in his chair. The fear left his eyes. For a moment his face was a study of perplexed thought. Then his thin lips pulled back in a smile and he laughed hoarsely.

"So the district attorney knows what you know and is afraid to act? So he knows there isn't any proof—only your word?" His face sobered and a confident look appeared in his eyes. "I've been a fool! You nearly had me believing you had me trapped! What good is your word with the law! The mad mouthings of a freak fortune teller! Who would believe you? Do you think any court in the land would accept your fantastic story of traveling through time and seeing what actually took place? You haven't got a thing on me! Do you understand that? *You can't prove a thing!*"

The smile faded from Simon Toper's face. For the first time since he had been in the room a frown creased his forehead. He stared at the now confident and smug countenance of Al Michaels and realized that the man was right. And it confused him. He hadn't thought about that. *Thought is the delicate balance...* The words crept into his mind again. What did they mean? He was suddenly unsure of himself. And it was a strange feeling. It was something new. Something he had not taken into consideration. He should have considered it. But he hadn't. And Michaels was right. He had used knowledge and the fear it produced as a wedge. Now the fear was gone. The knowledge was still there but there was no way to substantiate it. He knew now why Harry Borden had seemed almost hopeless.

"Then you refuse to sign a con-

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fession and free an innocent girl?" The fat man's voice held uncertainty.

"Refuse? I'm telling you to go to hell! There's not a thing you can do! Now get out of here and go back to Borden! Tell him what I said! He won't dare do a thing without proof!"

THE FAT man moved slowly toward the door. He was trying to figure it out. He hadn't really planned it this way. And yet...

"Wait! Come back here."

Michaels called to him and Toper turned back toward the desk. There was a crafty light in Michaels' eyes now as he leaned forward.

"Sit down, Toper. I just had an idea that might work out to our mutual benefit."

The fat man frowned.

"What is it?"

"It's this," Michaels lowered his voice, and as he spoke the light in his eyes grew harder, cunning. "I admit you could cause me some inconvenience by spreading your story around, Toper, and I also admit that I can't stop you. But the fact remains that you're not getting what you came for, and that's what you want, isn't it?"

"You mean your confession?"

Michaels shook his head and smiled.

"I mean a confession. Weber's!"

Toper continued to frown.

"I don't understand you."

The tall man spread his hands on the desk top.

"It's really quite simple. You're something of a remarkable man, Toper. You know that. The thought suddenly struck me that together we could make a beautiful team..."

"Just what sort of 'team'?" Toper asked slowly.

Michaels shrugged.

"In my business I make a lot of money, but I also lose a lot. Now you take just two items, the races and the stock market. If I had information before-hand of what was going to occur every day..."

The frown vanished from the fat man's face. He shook his head slowly.

"I wouldn't be interested. You represent something that I want no part of."

Michaels shrugged.

"I was going to offer you a confession. A confession that would free the Drake girl. Bluntly, I'm willing to make a deal with you."

Toper sat silently, staring at the tall man. Finally he asked:

"If you give me the confession you'll have to stand trial for murder."

Michaels picked up the gun from the desk top and slowly tapped it against the palm of his hand.

"You don't understand. The confession I'm speaking of is Weber. After all, it was he who shot Pratt. So he's the logical one to pay for the crime, isn't he?"

"Yes, but how will you make him confess?"

"Weber will do as I say. All of my men do as I say."

"Even to the extent of going to prison—or the electric chair? And what about yourself? Won't Weber incriminate you?"

A cold smile pulled Michaels' thin lips back.

"You let me worry about that. I guarantee that you'll have your confession. It will be signed by Weber, and the district attorney will have it in the morning. Is that fair enough?"

The fat man nodded grudgingly. Somehow, he knew, Michaels had turned the tables on him. It was he who was now doing the bargaining. And there was nothing that Toper could do but accept.

"If the district attorney has that confession in the morning, and the

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Drake girl is released, I'll agree to your terms.

"Then it's a deal. But let me warn you. Don't try and back out of your part of the bargain. While I may not be able to touch you, I can get the Drake girl anytime I want. Accidents are always happening..."

There was a cruel glitter in Michaels' eyes as his voice trailed off. He watched the fat man get to his feet.

"I'll keep my part of the bargain. You won't have to worry."

Michaels watched as Toper walked slowly to the door. As the fat man opened it, Michaels called after him, a puzzled frown on his face.

"This may seem like a ridiculous question, but I'm very curious. Just *who* are you?"

A faint smile crossed the fat man's features.

"Why, I'm Simon Toper. Don't you know?"

THEY FOUND Weber's body in the morning.

In a cheap rooming house on the edge of the city the police found him. He was lying on a bed, a bullet hole in his temple, the gun still clutched in his now rigid fingers.

On the floor beside his body was a signed confession, stating that he had killed James Pratt in a violent quarrel. The confession accused Pratt of a fradulent stock transaction, and it ended with the statement that Weber was tired of living with the crime on his mind, that he couldn't stand by and see an innocent person sent to the electric chair, and that he was going to commit suicide with the same gun he had used to kill Pratt.

In a matter of hours the ballistics of the gun had been checked against the bullet that killed Pratt.

It was the same gun.

Harry Borden sat in his office and read the confession again. He had already read it a dozen times, but he still didn't believe what he saw.

And yet he knew it was true. Simon Toper had said he would see Al Michaels. And that part still worried him. What about Michaels who was responsible for Pratt's death? Was there no way to connect the powerful syndicate chieftain with his crime? Had Simon Toper failed?

But no, the girl had been released. Toper hadn't failed. Borden himself had issued the order. He had told her how sorry he was and that he was glad she was proven innocent. She had thanked him curtly, the hurt still in her eyes. And she had left.

Now he was back in his office staring at the confession. A great weight seemed to have been lifted from him now as he looked at it. Nancy Drake was free. That was all that mattered. She still hated him, he knew that. And he couldn't blame her for that. He had seemed hard. Almost cruel. But it had been his job. And that came first. Maybe, sometime...

"Mr. Borden, Simon Toper to see you."

Borden heard his secretary's voice on the intercom.

He leaned forward and flicked the switch with an eager hand.

"Send him in!"

A moment later the door opened and Borden rose to greet the fat man.

"Toper, I don't know what to say...You did something that all the law enforcement agencies in this state could never have done!"

There was a smile on the fat man's face as he shrugged.

"Thank you. And Miss Drake?"

"She has been freed, of course. I tried to explain to her that it was you she had to thank, but I'm afraid she didn't understand."

"Then the case is closed?"

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Borden frowned, picking up the confession.

"Officially, yes. But between the two of us, no. I'm still remembering what you said—that it was Michaels who was behind the whole thing. He's the one who should have paid, not just Weber."

Toper sighed.

"Michaels has covered his own trail very thoroughly. With Weber out of the way he is in the clear. But of course, that was our bargain..."

"Bargain?" Surprise showed on Borden's lean features.

"Yes, I—"

TOPER'S voice broke off as a young woman walked into the office. She was dressed in a trim print dress, and her warm blue eyes were smiling. She walked past the fat man and up to Borden.

Borden looked with surprise into the eyes of Nancy Drake.

"Mr. Borden, I, I'm afraid I was very rude with you this morning. I've had time to think since you released me, and I know now that I was wrong about you. You really were trying to help me all along..."

Borden cleared his throat as his face flushed under her frank gaze.

"I don't deserve the credit, Nancy—Miss Drake, as I told you, it was all Mr. Toper's doing. I was only an instrument. You can thank him right now if you wish."

The girl followed Borden's gaze to the fat man. And as she looked at him, her face sobered into a grateful expression.

"You are Mr. Toper? The man who—saw what happened?"

Toper bowed gracefully and smiled at the girl.

"Not a word of thanks, Miss Drake. And don't let this young man tell you he doesn't deserve the credit. I happen to know that he was certain of your innocence all along."

The girl turned then to Borden and Toper walked toward the door.

Borden saw him leaving and started to walk toward him. Toper raised his hand.

"Don't bother to see me out. I just had to make sure that everything was all right. I hope I'll be seeing you both again..."

"Just a minute," Borden called to him. "You started to tell me about a bargain you made with Michaels. I'd like to know what it was. He's the man I'm really after."

Toper shook his head.

"I'm sorry. I can't tell you anything more. I made a bargain that I must keep."

He walked from the room then.

But he wasn't smiling.

AL MICHAELS was a happy man. Things were working out even better than he had anticipated. He had taken a gamble, he knew, when he had had Weber put out of the way and a fake confession rigged beside his body. For he had only the fat man's word that he would keep his part of the bargain.

But Toper had come back the very next day.

That had been over a month ago.

He smiled to himself when he thought of that past month. It had really been something. Horse races, the stock market, and sundry other fields of speculation. It was uncanny. Toper would predict a horse winning. The horse would win. Toper would predict a stock rise. The stock would soar. And with each prediction Michaels would clean up a young fortune.

He had been a rich man before.

He was a multi-millionaire now.

And it was only the beginning.

Yes, Michaels smiled to himself. He had really made a shrewd bar-

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gain. He had teamed up with a man whose strange abilities could make him the most powerful man in the world. The world...The very thought brought an eager anticipation to him. Why not? There was nothing to stand in his way. Nothing, as long as Toper stood behind him.

He frowned slightly at that.

He had been watching Toper. He had expected some sign of resentment from the fat man. He had not expected the completely wholehearted cooperation that the fat man was giving him. Never a complaint. Never a wish to withdraw from his part of the agreement.

Toper was a fool.

He could have had everything for himself.

Or was he a fool?...

Michaels wondered. He remembered a few particular things. Just little things, but they might be important.

Like the way Toper arrived at his predictions. Always that fuzzy aura surrounding him as he seemed to lose himself in time. That shimmering for the barest part of a second.

Toper had done that on other occasions when he wasn't supposed to be fortelling the future. Any number of times in Michaels' own study. Now that he thought about it it seemed more than strange. What had the fat man been doing? Looking into the future for some unknown reason? Or—

A cold suspicion suddenly filled Michaels. Or looking into the past?

A chill took hold of Michaels as he thought of the possibility. For that brought up many memories to him. Memories of numerous crimes that had been plotted in this very study. Murders. Robberies. Shady political deals. And countless other things that he himself had already forgotten.

Was Simon Toper checking up on him?

Was he really delving into the past, gathering damning evidence against him?

And if he was, what was his purpose?

Michaels shrugged. He was imagining things. His fears were getting the better of him. Toper couldn't do anything to him...

And he couldn't do anything to Toper...

That thought worried him more than anything else. It was something that made him lay awake nights. He would toss on his bed trying to think it out straightly. He could never forget the day he had shot Toper in the heart. Only Toper hadn't been there when the bullet arrived. He wondered. What sort of a man was it who could move faster than the streaking speed of a bullet?

And he remembered when he had asked Toper the question: "Who are you?" And the reply. "Why, I'm Simon Toper. Don't you know?"

Michaels didn't know.

But suddenly he wanted to know. More than anything in the world he wanted to know. He must know. For only if he knew could he protect himself if the time ever came.

...Yes, that was it. All he had to do was find out what—who Simon Toper was. That was the key. Where he had come from. All the details of his past life.

Michaels smiled grimly to himself at that. He would find out.

IT TOOK him a whole month.

Michaels used every means at his disposal. Every connection he had in the country. He checked Simon Toper from every conceivable angle. He found out every known detail of his life.

And even before the month was

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over he knew what it all added up to.

Nothing.

He had tried fingerprints first. Every one of the millions of prints on file in Washington had been checked against Toper's.

Toper's wasn't there.

He had tried birth records.

In every city of the country. In every town. Every village.

Toper's wasn't there.

He had even examined the police records. Any little trace might help. The newspapers.

Nothing.

In the entire country there was no record of Simon Toper. He had spent a fortune in his search. To find nothing.

And finally he had checked on his own city.

He had found nothing that he did not already know....But wait, there was *one* t ng. One peculiar incident.

He had gotten the lead from the Central Hospital. Private investigators had found out that a Simon Toper had been listed on the hospital records as an emergency case.

He had checked into that.

And when he had finished his head was in a whirl.

Seven doctors and nurses swore that they had taken care of Simon Toper. *But each one claimed he had suffered from a different injury!*

And each one had been reticent about discussing it. They wanted to forget that they had ever heard of Simon Toper.

He didn't blame them.

What did it all mean?

Who was Simon Toper?

What was Simon Toper?

One clue. Only one. The hospital. What had happened there. But that clue seemed vague. Almost nonexistent. It might just as well mean that there never had been a Simon Toper.

Michaels' breath caught sharply in his throat. He forced himself to remain calm. What was that? What had he thought? No--it couldn't be possible.

Or could it? What did Toper say constantly? *"Time means nothing to me. You can't kill me. It took time for your bullet to reach me. Time means nothing to me...."*

Time...

In desperation Michaels turned to science. He knew little about it. But maybe there was an answer waiting to be found. There had to be!

...He read every book he could find on metaphysics. He poured through them. He read them again and again.

At first he found them difficult to understand. They spoke of time, the fourth dimension. Space warps. Telepathy. But gradually he learned. And as he learned, the suspicion in his mind grew. It was such a fantastic suspicion that he was afraid to believe it possible.

But it was the only answer.

And when he had finished the books he knew what he had to do. There was only one way to find out for sure. Everything would hinge on that one thing. If it happened the way he thought it would then his suspicion would be correct.

He would know then who Simon Toper was.

And Simon Toper would be in his power...to destroy at will.

Michaels sat at his desk and smiled grimly.

SOFT DANCE music filtered through the air of the night club, mingling with the laughs and murmurs of a gay evening crowd. The lighting was pleasantly low, accentuating the charms of the beautiful, alluding charms to those who were not.

Al Michaels sat at his corner table,

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away from the main part of the crowd. He had picked his spot deliberately. With the utmost care. He did not want to be obtrusive. He wanted to be able to sit and watch. Especially one table. A table toward the front of the club, at the edge of the dance floor.

He could see three people seated at that table. Three people who were laughing and talking.

There was Harry Borden, the district attorney. There was Nancy Drake.

And there was Simon Toper.

They were sitting and talking and laughing together. He had been watching them since they first came in. He had known they were coming. Toper himself had told him that Borden and the girl were going to celebrate their engagement. They had asked Toper to come along with them. It had been a simple matter for Michaels to reserve just the right table so that he could watch them without being seen himself.

He glanced slowly around the room. At the other end, near the entrance, he saw another table, with four men sitting and drinking. They did not seem to be interested in anything around them outside of their own conversation.

But Michaels knew they were alert. Alert and watchful. Waiting for a signal from him. He smiled to himself. But then the smile faded. Would he give them the signal they were waiting for? That all depended...

His eyes switched back to the table at the edge of the dance floor. He saw Borden leaning forward across the table and talking closely to Toper. He could see Borden's face from a side view, and he could see that the district attorney was not smiling now. Whatever he was saying, and whatever Toper was replying, was in serious earnestness.

And then Michaels stiffened. His features became hard and worried.

He saw Toper reach inside his dinner jacket and withdraw a thick envelope from an inside pocket. He handed it across to Borden. And as Borden tapped the envelope in his hands, Michaels felt a chill go through him.

That envelope could mean only one thing.

He knew suddenly that his fears about Toper were justified. The fat man had been checking into his past—and in that envelope would be enough facts to put him away for life!

Michaels knew it as surely as he knew he was sitting watching them.

And he also knew that he had no time to waste now.

He glanced across the room and caught the eye of a pretty camera girl. He had already made arrangements with her. She caught his signal and nodded.

Michaels watched as her slim legs moved between the crowded tables toward the front of the club. And then she had reached the table and was smiling at the three people there.

Michaels saw her raise her camera. He saw the three at the table smile in anticipation.

Then the flash bulb went off. The girl moved swiftly away toward the rear of the club.

Michaels knew it would take only a few minutes. It was a common practice in night clubs to take photographs of the patrons. There was only a small charge, and the picture was developed in a few minutes.

BUT MICHAELS knew that none of the three would ever see that picture. He had made his arrangements with the girl. She would tell them that the negative had spoiled. But in the meantime she would give

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him a print.

He waited.

He waited and watched as Borden opened the envelope and began to read the papers that were inside it.

And as he watched he saw the district attorney's face become grim. Michaels knew what that meant...

"Here's the photo, Mr. Michaels."

Michaels tore his eyes away from the three at the table and looked up to see the camera girl standing beside him. She wasn't smiling. Her face was white. There was even fear in her eyes.

She handed him the picture.

"I don't understand it—I'm certain he was there when I—"

But Michaels wasn't listening. He was looking at the print with feverish eyes. And as he looked he felt his fingers tremble.

The picture showed the table. It showed Harry Borden. It showed Nancy Drake.

But Simon Toper's chair was empty!

"I must be going crazy—I know he was there—"

Michaels heard the camera girl speaking in a fearful voice. He looked up at her and swiftly drew a twenty dollar bill from his pocket.

"Here. Forget about the picture. Understand? Not a word to anyone!"

The girl took the proferred money and nodded. Then she moved swiftly away from his table, as if she wished she had never gone there in the first place.

But Michaels wasn't thinking about her. He was staring at the picture again. And as he stared at it he felt an exultation sweep through him. For he had found the truth!

He knew now about Simon Toper!

His eyes glanced up toward the table ahead. He saw the three rising, and Borden putting the envelope in his inside pocket. Michaels' face was grim then and slowly a crafty smile pulled at his thin lips.

He knew what to do now.

He turned and found the table close to the entrance. The four men sitting there were seemingly engrossed in their own small talk. But as Michaels gave a curt nod they suddenly ceased talking and rose.

They left the night club. And behind them as Michaels watched, Borden, the girl, and Simon Toper made their way casually toward the exit.

Michaels slipped the photo in his pocket and sat back. He was in no hurry now. He even had time for another drink. Then he would return to his penthouse apartment.

They would all be waiting for him there...

"JUST WHAT is the meaning of this, Michaels?"

Harry Borden demanded angrily as Al Michaels strode into the study.

Michaels stared casually at the three people standing in the middle of the room. He saw the four men who had kidnapped them outside the night club, holding guns in their hands, pointing them at the three people. Michaels smiled to himself. It had all worked very smoothly. And Simon Toper hadn't dared to try to leave for the police. He had given his men explicit instructions that the girl and Borden were to be killed if Toper tried to leave. He knew that Toper wouldn't try anything with that threat waiting to be carried out.

Michaels moved slowly across the room and behind his desk. He sat down and casually pulled open a side drawer. He pulled his own gun from it and checked it. Then, satisfied, he motioned to his men.

"Leave us alone. I can handle things from here on."

The four men shrugged and pocket-

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ed their guns. They left the room in a group. After the door had closed, Michaels turned his gaze on the three, his gun held firmly in his right hand.

"I asked you before, what's the meaning of this?" Borden's voice came angrily. "This is kidnapping! Do you realize what you've done?"

Michaels smiled at him.

"Most certainly, Borden. You're right. It is kidnapping. And since you're the district attorney that should put me in a very precarious position."

"It will put you in jail for the rest of your life! With everything else I know about you now—"

"Ah," Michaels breathed in satisfaction. "So I was right about the contents of that envelope in your coat pocket."

He saw Borden's face show surprise. Then Michaels switched his gaze on the fat men.

Toper was staring at him with a puzzled look, as if he were trying to understand just what had made Michaels do this.

"You haven't been fooling me, Toper," Michaels accused him. "I've known for some time that you were delving into my past. You have that peculiar habit of nearly vanishing when you travel through time. Or shall I say, when your *mind,* travels through time..."

Toper looked at him steadily but said nothing.

"You've been double-crossing me behind my back, Toper," Michaels said.

The fat man shrugged.

"I carried out my part of our bargain. But I didn't say anything about not trying to put you in jail where you belong. I'm glad to say that the district attorney has all the facts I've gathered..."

"Facts which he'll never use," Michaels added.

The fat man smiled then.

"You wouldn't dare kill him. What would that gain you? I can walk out of here and give my information to the police at any time—and you'd go to the chair for murder then."—

Michaels shook his head and the crafty smile on his face widened.

"That's where you're wrong, Toper. You see, I've also taken care of that little detail. I'm going to kill Borden and the girl, destroy the papers you gave Borden, and you won't be able to do anything about it."

The fat man laughed.

"Aren't you forgetting about me? Don't you know who I am?"

Michaels nodded.

"That's just it, Toper. I *know* who and what you are. But you don't!"

THE LAUGH faded from Toper's face. He stared curiously at Michaels. And as he stared, a sudden doubt entered his mind. What did Michaels mean? Of course he knew who he was...

"I've spent a great deal of money during the past month checking on you, Toper," Michaels spoke smoothly. "And I learned one pertinent fact. You have no record in any community in the country outside of this one. At first that was a very puzzling fact, a very disturbing one. Because I had to know where you came from. But seemingly you came from nowhere. And that's when I first began to suspect the truth. The truth that even you aren't aware of."

Michaels paused, and he saw the tense looks on the faces of all three. Then his gaze fastened on Simon Toper's face again. He saw the fat man staring at him puzzledly.

"I started to do some reading, Toper. There had to be some reason why you alone of all men could travel through time, why time meant

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nothing to you."

Toper felt his mind grasp at Michaels' words. As yet, Michaels had not said anything that he did not already know. Of course time meant nothing to him...

"And I learned a lot about time and the fourth dimension from what I read. I learned enough so that I suddenly knew what you are—who you are. But I still had to be sure. And there was only one way to make certain. I did that tonight at the night club."

Toper watched as Michaels reached into his coat pocket with his left hand and brought out a glossy print. Michaels tossed it across the desk where they could all see it. And as Toper looked at it he felt a growing confusion inside him. He heard Borden explain:

"Why that's the picture the girl took at our table—"

"But where is Simon Toper?" the girl gasped. "His chair is empty!"

Borden's face showed amazement.

"Is this some trick? The girl said the negative was ruined. We met her on the way out of the club..."

Michaels shook his head.

"The negative was not ruined. It was I who had that picture taken. I told her to tell you the negative was ruined. I did that for a purpose. You see, I *knew* what the picture would show. I knew what it *had* to show! And I was right!"

There was a tense silence as Michaels paused. And Simon Toper tore his eyes from the photograph to stare in growing confusion at the face of Michaels.

"I know who and what you are, Simon Toper. And because I know, you no longer hold a threat to me—to anyone!

"I'm going to tell you. And after I tell you I'm going to kill Borden and the girl. And you won't stop me. You see, Toper, all of us in this room except you live in three dimensions. But we have an awareness of a fourth dimension, and that is time. Do you understand? We live in three and have an awareness of a fourth. But you, Toper, you do not live in three dimensions. You already live in *four* and have an awareness of a *fifth!* That fifth demension of yours Toper, is your mind, your thoughts, your—"

Thought is the delicate balance... It pounded through Simon Toper's head. The puzzling phrase. The phrase he never had quite understood. It grew in his mind, became a buzzing echo, a laugh...

—"ability to travel through a dimension at will that we in this room only have an awareness of. Do you know what that means, Toper? It means that you are a figment of your own thoughts—your own imagination! *You do not exist, Toper!*"

Michaels' voice ended on a shouting tone. And as he sat, his face a grim mask, silence fell.

And Simon Toper staggered back, shaking his head.

"You're wrong—you must be! I'm here—"

Michaels laughed at him then.

"You're not here, Toper. You only *think* you are!"

Thought is the delicate balance!

"You don't believe me? Look, Toper—look at the photograph! There's your proof! You do not exist! And as soon as you *think* that I'm telling the truth—and you know I am—you will cease to be—you will vanish!"

The fat man shook his head.

"No! No! It can't be—I'm Simon Toper! I'm—"

"You only have to *think,* Toper!"

And suddenly the fat man's face showed a puzzled calm. *Thought is the delicate balance...* He saw himself again in the hospital. He re-

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membered the same phrase that had puzzled him. Was it possible—

Simon Toper thought about it. And as he thought, *he knew the answer...*

He vanished from the room.

A HARSH laughter welled from the throat of Al Michaels as he saw the fat figure of Simon Toper disappear. And he heard the startled cry of the girl, and the shocked gasp from Harry Borden. The two were gazing in awed horror at the spot where Simon Toper had stood.

Michaels slowly raised the gun and pointed it at them.

* * *

Thought is the delicate balance...

He heard the words as from some deep sounding well. He tried to open his eyes and see where the sound was coming from. But he couldn't seem to open them. He mused on that for a moment. And then he knew.

He had no eyes.

He tried to lift his hand to his forehead to think. But he couldn't seem to lift his hand. He thought about that strange fact too. And then he knew.

He had no hands.

He had no body!

He heard he words again. *Thought is the delicate balance...*And he knew he really didn't hear them. For he had no ears to hear.

It was himself. The thought was himself!

And as the awareness grew in him he sighed. The sigh of a motionless wind in an empty space. Only he was aware of it. Only he existed...

He knew it all now. The whole truth. The truth that even Al Michaels had not dreamed of. Michaels had been close. He had called him a product of his own imagination, a figment, a thought...and of course, he was right. And why not?

The whole world of Al Michaels and Nancy Drake and Harry Borden was a product of his thought—a figment he had created in the delicate balance of his cosmic mind!

He laughed. A thundering laughter that echoed through endless corridors in a black emptiness.

The whole world had ceased to exist! The moment he had vanished it had ceased to exist!

He laughed again. That was what Michaels hadn't known. The real truth. The *whole* truth. And it was a just dessert for Michaels. He felt satisfied about that.

But then suddenly he was not glad. He remembered Harry Borden and Nancy Drake. They had been so happy together. They had been planning their life, looking into the future, a home, and everything it meant...

Must *they* suffer too?

He thought about it.

No, that wouldn't be right. Michaels deserved his fate, but not Harry Borden and Nancy Drake. They had harmed no one...

But what could he do?

Thought is the delicate balance...

Certainly! It was simple...The world was his creation and it had ceased to exist—but what he had once created, could he not bring into existance again? And in any way he wanted to?

He put the thought into action and knew it was now complete. The same world. Everything about it. *Everything except one small detail!*

And his laughter echoed into the vast corridors of time.

* * *

Borden felt the girl trembling in his arms as they both gazed in shocked awe at the spot where Simon Toper had stood. The spot that was now vacant.

And they heard the grim laughter of Al Michaels behind them. And they knew what that meant. Even

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now Michaels would be pointing his gun at them, and in a moment they would feel the crash of bullets in their bodies.

They turned slowly as Michaels' laughter stopped. They turned to look at him as he shot them.

But of course, Michaels wasn't there...

THE END

THE FEMALE RULES

By RALPH BAILLEY

MOST MEN have a tendency to consider themselves as the dominant part of the human race. And, as history and civilization has evolved, in essence men are the dominant factor.

And yet, there is a civilization wherein the male is a minor character, and the female the dominant personality. This civilization is one that numerically makes the human race look like a decimal point. That civilization is the world of ants.

In many respects the ant is similiar to man. Ants are banded together in colonies, even as men are. Ants build their homes and maintain their communities, even as men do. Their are certain types of ants that even raise their own food, as man does. In the case of the ant it is a fungi that is grown in the nest and eaten. And even further, ants, like men, have their wars among themselves.

The one major difference however, in drawing a parallel between the civilization of man and that of the ant, lies in the fact that in the ant world, unlike that of man, the female is the ruling factor. Female ants are the workers, and the head of the ant community is a female Queen. The lowly male is tolerated only for the purpose of reproduction. He appears at the swarming time, impregnates the Queen, and quickly proceeds to die, his earthly mission accomplished. Here certainly is a radical departure from the usual role the male finds himself a part of in life. For in the ant world it is the female who calls the tune, and the male meekly succumbs and does as he is bid. Of course, the male ant has one consolation. His is a life of ease until the mating period. He can sit and twiddle his thumbs, (ant variety) and watch the females build the nests and provide the food, while he collects his own particular kind of social security. So even though Mother Nature deals harshly with the lowly male in the ant world at mating time, there is a balancing factor that makes his life one of ease—while he lives!

PRINCE OF PHILOSOPHERS

By RAMSEY SINCLAIR

IN THE YEAR 1225 a child was born in the province of Naples, who in his later years was to become known to the world as the Prince of Philosophers. He was also, many years after his death, to be canonized as another and final proof of his great mind. He was Thomas Aquinas.

He spent his early youth much as other lads of his era. He studied elementary education in the Abbey of Monte Cassino, and from there, in 1239 he went to the University of Naples. Five years thereafter he joined the order of St. Dominic, although his family was adamantly opposed to his decision.

In 1245 he journeyed to Paris, where for the next few years, until 1248, he studied under the personal attention of Albert the Great. He received his Mastery in Theology after composing the commentaries on the Bible and the Sentences in 1256, and for the next few years he engaged himself in defending the order to which he belonged against William of St. Armour, spokesman for the University of Paris.

He later taught in the Pontifical Curia in Rome, and later returned to Paris (1268) where he violently opposed the Franciscan supporters of Augustinianism. Finally, in 1272 he returned to Naples to teach. And in 1274, when he had been called to the presence of Gregory X, he died enroute to Lyons.

This then, is the brief background that tells part of the story of why he was considered prince of philosophers. The details, however, are more exacting. For Thomas Aquinas was a man of many facets. He was just as avidly interested in politics, theology, mysticism, and metaphysics. He was further, a truly sincere scholar, practicing the policy of persuasion, rather than that of denunciation. His judgment was keen and level on all matters, and even his most bitter opponents grudgingly admitted the calm, powerful reasoning he set forth.

To he alone was bestowed the title of *Doctor Angelicus*. And to this day, in all matters of theological philosophy especially, he is considered to be generally without peer.

* * *

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LEAKING VALVE

By CAL WEBB

ONE OF THE great afflictions to which man is susceptible is that of heart failure. And one of the commonly heard types of heart condition is that of a leaking valve.

What causes a leaking heart valve is an interesting study. For first of all we have to understand just what the valve does in its normal functions. In the left ventrical of the heart we find the aortic valve, consisting of three leaflet-like pocket folds, the free edges of which are directed away from the heart.

Blood flows into the aorta with each heartbeat, but is prevented from flowing out again by the action of this valve.

When the body is perfectly healthy this valve does its duty as nature intended, helping reduce the work the heart is called upon to do in pumping the blood through our bodies. But often, when certain diseases ravage the body, such as rheumatic fever, this tiny, but exceedingly important valve becomes shrunken, the leaflets thick and useless. This in turn puts a great strain on the heart for it must then pump harder to maintain an adequate blood supply.

It would be such a simple task to repair this valve if the human body were like that of an automobile motor, where the motor could be turned off and the parts dismantled. Then the valve could undergo a "grind" job in effect, or if it was found to be beyond use, a new valve inserted.

However, such is unfortunately not the case, and thus far we find that the motor of the human "machine" cannot be treated like that of an automobile. So while we may know that we have a "leaking valve", we still do not know just what to do about it for a perfect overhaul job.

But on the brighter side we have medical science delving deeper every day into the mysteries of the human anatomy. And what seems like an impossible hurdle to cross today, may be a simple matter tomorrow.

In any event, we'll have to hold on to our valves for the present, leaky or not. Getting a new one is still a matter for tomorrow's miracles.

BLOOD STARVATION

By PETE BOGG

WHEN WE think of hunger, the first thought that crosses our mind is usually the lack of food in the stomach. Every one of us has at one time or another experienced a gnawing feeling in the pit of the abdomen, and when this sign becomes part of our awareness we head for the kitchen or the nearest restaurant to alleviate it.

Not so the vital stream of life that courses through the stomach and the rest of the body, however. For the blood that courses through our veins is subject even more than the stomach to the pangs of starvation. What is its food? Oxygen. The most important food that is known to man. For without it, in a mere matter of minutes or less, life ceases to exist.

Every mountaineer can tell you of the symptoms of blood hunger in high altitudes. For the higher man climbs, the less oxygen he takes in with every breath. And as the supply of this vital blood food diminishes, unless the individual has acclimated his body to the condition so that he can stand it for a period of time, a feeling of drowsiness ensues, accompanied at times with severe headache, distortion of the visual and auditory senses, and very often, pains in the chest surrouding the heart.

These signs tell the mountaineer that his blood is screaming for food, and that unless he answers that demand he may suffer serious consequences.

During the past war, when high altitude flying was a vital part of our combat strategy, scientists were kept constantly busy devising and perfecting apparatus to make the breathing of flyers easier, to provide sufficient oxygen to the blood without overdoing it. For just as in the case of the stomach, where overeating produces symptoms of distress, so in the blood, an excess of oxygen produces symptoms not to be desired.

The important thing to remember, and to know, is that a human being may starve to death not only by a lack of food in the stomach. Blood starvation is far more serious, and its fatal results are inevitably more rapid. For this reason it is usually wise to have a thorough physical checkup before departing on a trip to high altitudes. For while your car may be loaded with food, the atmosphere in higher altitudes may be, in your particular case, as barren as Mother Hubbard's Cupboard!

* * *

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Mathematical Confusion

By LYNN STANDISH

RECENTLY the question was raised, "how do you go about adding up the terms of that famous series, one plus two plus two-squared plus two-cubed plus two-to-the-fourth etc.?" It comes from the old problem of putting a grain of wheat on one square of a chessboard, two on the next, four on the next, eight on the next, and so on.

Naturally there is an obvious way: simply add up each of the terms starting with the first, then the second, then the third and so on until the desired number of terms (in this problem, sixty-four) has been arrived at.

But a formula has been calculated for such a geometric series. In fact a formula can be designed for any such series. In this case the formula is quite simple and easy to apply. It requires hardly any work. It goes this way: The sum of the first n terms is equal to the N plus oneth term minus one. That's all there is to it! Thus, if we want to know the sum of the first sixty-four terms of the geometric series mentioned above, we simply calculate the sixty-fifth term, and substract one. Then we have our answer, the sum of the first sixty-four terms.

An interesting story is told about geometric series. It concerns one of the world's greatest mathematicians, a man always ranked with Archimedes and Sir Isaac Newton, Gauss. It seems that when Gauss went to grammar school in a small German town in the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, the schoolmaster was somewhat of a martinet who enjoyed seeing his students work hard. He presented a long geometric series to the students, telling them to hand in their slates when they had finished. Knowing that it involved the addition of numerous terms, the schoolmaster sat back and decided to take a long rest.

To his astonishment, a few minutes later, Gauss stepped forward, flung his slate on the schoolmaster's desk and said in his very coarse German dialect, "Lieget da!" (there it lies). The schoolmaster was at first angry, then astonished when he saw that Gauss had deduced the formula for the sum of the series and had avoided the elaborate arithmetic. Fortunately, the schoolmaster was fairly understanding. He commended Gauss and introduced him to the study of other and more advanced texts. Now it is a matter of history what happened to the peasant boy. Gauss is one with the immortals.

It is wonderful to have such mathematical ability. A true creative mathematician seems to be borne rather than created. Most people can study and learn mathematics without great difficulty, but to create something new in the mathematical field is another story. There is a strange blend of knowledge and intuition which is not easily arrived at. It requires great inherent ability. That is why, when anyone says he is a mathematician, look at him suspiciously and question his ability. There are very few.

* * *

SOLDIERS OF LILLIPUT

By T. A. KEDZIE

IN HUNDREDS of laboratories all over the Earth scientists are working day and night. In these labs there are no huge machines, there is no massive cyclotron nor any of the paraphernalia commonly associated with modern science. But the labs are well hidden and probably greater secrecy is maintained over them than over the buildings where atomic research is engaged in. For these labs are busy turning out the smallest and deadliest soldiers of them all—bacteria!

While atomic research and rocketry get all the headlines, notoriously little space is given to the efforts of bacteriological warfare experts—and yet it is possible that these men will provide the real horror of any next conflict.

During the Second World War all the major combatants maintained bacteriological laboratories and what horrors were cooked up in them we can only guess, but no one had the audacity to use any of their products. It is rumored that Japan did use some bacterial infections in China, sort of experimentally, but not on a large scale—although this information cannot be confirmed.

Everyone now, however, realizes the possibilities inherent in this type of warfare

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and plans are being made accordingly. The work in the laboratories is not simply a matter of cultivating huge quantities of germs. Rather it is a coordinated research effort to breed germs of ever greater malignancy and potency. These fearful concoctions are capable of wiping out populations indiscriminately and for this reason alone—more than any other—the nations have been afraid to launch what might prove to be a boomerang.

Bacteriological warfare can be engaged in on a secretive level. There need be no fanfare to announce it, but insidiously, like a thief in the night, powerful strains of germs may be placed in water supplies, food supplies and the like. And until the germs act, all are unaware that any hostile action has been taken.

Such an opening may well characterize the next war—if it comes. First, bacteriological invasion, followed by the rockets and the bombs. Immunization of populations is possible, but not all diseases succumb to this counter-fire. Perhaps there are hideously malignant germ structures which can be fought with nothing. In order to protect its population a user of such a strain must first determine the antidote.

When General Omar Bradley said modern man was characterized by "great power and little wisdom" he was right. And it is ironic that the greatest international brotherhood of men—the scientists—have to be in back of this preparation for war. The Lilliputian soldiers who come out of a bottle—germs—may provide the decisive answer to the next war. That answer may mean that the only ones alive after the conflict may be an earthly group stronger than Man—say, the insects!

* * *

AMERICAN ASTRONOMY

By W. R. CHASE

IT IS NOT a wise idea to associate nationalism with science—science is too universal for that, but it is an interesting commentary on our times to note that the United States is the heart and core of experimental astronomy. Usually we connect our country with practical, pragmatic industrial progress. But it so happens that we have also done the greatest job of providing experimental facilities for astronomy. Not only are the largest reflecting and refracting telescopes located in the United States but the *most* of them are here.

Until the beginning of the Second World War, astronomy, on a world wide basis went something like this. Europe produced most of the theoretical advances, while our country provided the observations and the data on which those advances were made. Then the holocaust of war stepped in and now the United States is foremost in astronomy as it is in physics.

Yet, we must counter the idea that science belongs to us, in spite of the fact that we have nurtured it so carefully here. During the war, astronomers with governmental permission exchanged periodicals and certain data, with fine disregard of wartime ideologies. Science is too timeless for that.

There is a general revolt, in connection with the facilities afforded to scientific enterprise here, which threatens to do some startling things. Even though the United States is the heart and harbor of physics, mathematics and astronomy—and even chemistry, scientists are already pointing out the dangers involved in just assuming that we have the best. No where else in the world are there such facilities for study as in this country. But prominent physicists have pointed out that science is not only a matter of laboratories and instrumentation—it is primarily a matter of *ideas* and *thinking*, neither of which require anything but brains.

An American physicist went so far as to write a humorous song about the general trend of things. "Take away your cyclotrons, take away your betatrons," he cried, in grim satire on the fact that many of our universities are not turning out thinking physicists, but simply technicians. Furthermore, the government censorship of science threatens to aid in this process of turning out mechanics.

What the remedy is, no one knows. That scientific research, the United States must there will be a solution is certain, however. emphasize the basic nature of science. Gadgets and machines do not make a scientific world. Science is a way of looking at things, of examining one's surroundings.

Already, Europe, slowly emerging from the ghastly ruins of the war, is asserting itself. Periodicals are being revived and scientists are gathering about them a nucleus of figures, much in the fashion of the twenties and the thirties. It must be remembered that most theoretical advances were due to European science of the preceeding two or three decades. Planck, Heisenberg, De Broglie, Schroedinger, and others laid the foundation for the atomic bomb, and nuclear physics. We are about exhausting that fertile bank they unearthed. It is up to us as well as the Europeans to provide new mines—and this is best done by training men to think and to create. Do not let the announcement of a new cyclotron deceive you!

* * *

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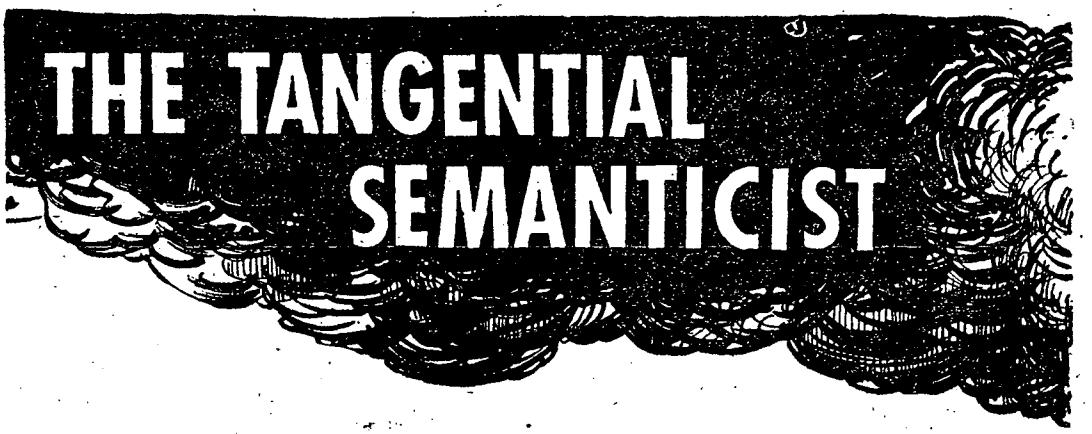

By Rog Phillips

It was all a matter of logic and how you applied it. Tell a man one thing with two meanings — and watch for a third result!

GEORGE BROWN glanced around swiftly to make sure no one was in sight, then slipped into the dark alley. A few steps brought him to a door. The key was already in his hand. He unlocked the door with the special procedure that signalled below. Three times he locked and unlocked the bolt, and three times a bright bulb flashed in the room two stories underground.

Opening the door just enough to squeeze through, he closed it. The street noises ended abruptly to be replaced by complete silence except for the sound of his footsteps as he rapidly descended the stairs in the darkness.

At the bottom he placed his back to the damp sts-metal wall and took a deep breath. Before him was the labyrinth. A misstep meant immediate death. In total darkness he took three steps forward, five to the right, two to the right, seven to the left.

Light suddenly burst upon him, blinding him. He stopped. Someone took his hand. He let it move passively and felt the fingers curl over an ink pad, then over the blank sheet of paper as his fingerprints were taken.

The faint pressure against his shirt front for several seconds, he knew, was the sensitive mike that picked up his heart beat and wrote it on a graph to compare with a similar chart from the files.

The cold touch of a solvent probed at the small mole under his right ear and was instantly wiped off with soft cotton.

A faint click sounded from somewhere. It was the signal. He recited the poem as he always had, knowing that his voice was making a wavering line on a chart to be compared with the original in his file.

Then the blinding light was gone. The whole thing had taken no more than three minutes. Sight returned slowly.

There were seven men in the room. They were the expendable identification squad. He smiled at them

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George poured the fluid over the lock and instantly it began to melt away from the door . . .

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briefly and strode across the room, conscious of its six inch thick steel walls designed to confine any blast of explosive he could have carried concealed in his clothes.

The vault door in the opposite wall opened ponderously to give him passage. It was already closing again as he stepped across the threshold into the inner headquarters of the underground.

Mr. Grant stood in the middle of the thick rug, a quiet smile of welcome on his face. He was the master mind pitted against the cunning of the entire staff of Dictator Kritt, fighting a last ditch battle for humanity.

He was a small man, just an inch over five feet in height and a hundred and twenty pounds in weight. Yet in his presence no one ever felt enough his equal to call him by his first name. He was Mr. Grant to all. His piercing blue eyes under perpetually frowning brows, his high forehead, and his intellectual face gave him an aura of power not belied by the plans he created and quietly put into operation.

George advanced with a smile of relief and the two men shook hands.

"I made it, Mr. Grant," George exclaimed triumphantly.

IN A BLUR of movement Mr. Grant brought a flat automatic into view and pointed it at George. His knuckle whitened against the trigger. There was regret and disappointment in his eyes.

On George's face was a look of triumph, regret, sadness, and resignation. In spite of the conditioning and control of the enemy, his mind had been able to betray them. They had been lulled by the triumphant passing through the identification squad.

"Wait, dad!" Joan Grant's voice sounded from the other side of the luxurious room where she had just come in. "Please don't. Lock him up until the doctors can try to free him."

"You know that's hopeless," Mr. Grant said without turning his head. "No one conditioned the way Kritt's psych staff does it, can ever be freed."

"Please, dad," Joan's voice was pleading.

"What do *you* say, George?" Mr. Grant asked, his lips a thin line.

"Shoot me," George answered tonelessly.

"Wait." It was a new voice, deep, masculine. The man advanced from the open door at the side of the room. His heavy body was clad in a pepper brown suit. His smoothly combed jet black hair and frigid eyes carried a hint of excitement.

"Wait," he repeated. "I have an idea I want to try on him before you shoot him. It'll take a couple of days. If I fail it will be time enough to kill him."

"What can you do, Dr. Blake?" Mr. Grant asked. "It's already been proven you can't free him."

"No," Dr. Blake admitted. "We can't free him, but maybe we can use him."

"It's too dangerous," Mr. Grant objected. "With the government telepaths in constant contact with his thoughts anything you try will be instantly known to them and reported. Anything you discover will just be used against us."

"True," Dr. Blake admitted, smiling grimly. "That is just what I am hoping they will do."

Mr. Grant hesitated.

"Please give him a chance, dad," Joan pleaded.

George waited emotionlessly for either death or reprieve. He knew that Joan had meant something very special to him once, and could again. But he had just asked for death and had expected it. He had made his mind ready for it. No man who does

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that can spring back at once.

He saw an imperceptible relaxing of the whitened knuckle about the trigger and knew he would live—for a little while yet. He didn't move when Dr. Blake came beside him and plunged the needle through the cloth covering his arm.

He turned his eyes to Joan and kept them there, letting her face seep into his soul while the darkness of drugged consciousness stole over him. He was still seeing her face with its trembling, sensitive lips and tear filled eyes long after he was led through the side door and into a small room in the hospital section of the underground headquarters.

GEORGE felt himself floating in a swirling vortex of black, spiralling night. He felt detached from his body and yet tied to it. The voices came from a vast distance. One was the voice of Dr. Blake, low and rich in tone and there were other voices. The voice of the government psychologist and his assistants. They were farther away—thought voices in his mind.

He tried to concentrate on what they said. They faded. The black swirlings became deeper and swifter. Swifter...

Suddenly a thought became clear in his consciousness. It was crystal clear, abnormally sharp.

"If someone else can read your thoughts and control your actions you can reverse the process and do it to him."

He felt his lips move. Another voice joined those in his mind. It was his own.

"But if I try to do that they will break the contact," he heard himself say.

"You musn't let that happen!" Dr. Blake's voice came sharply. "The only reason they can break the contact is because you continually *want* it to break. If you refuse to break it they can't. You must hold it while I show you how to turn the tables on them and make them do *your* bidding."

A voice spoke in his mind. He listened to what it said. It was the voice of the government psychologist. But it was more than his voice now. It was the thoughts behind the voice, the cautious alarm in the psychologist's mind, the furtive caution, the tense watching for something threatening.

"See?" Dr. Blake's voice came. The single word carried a world of meaning.

The psychologist's thought came with forceful clarity. "How could you possibly use me?"

A torrent of thought flowed into the black vortex, swirling downward into infinite depths. There were images of the government psychologist reading secret files, substituting new ones in their place. There were images of him conditioning high officials to do the bidding of the underground.

A high whining sound came, creeping down from the highest range slowly until it was a paralyzing, dominating shrill.

The black vortex blasted into trailing streamers of creamy mud. They slowed with a deep excruciating pain like that of a knife scraping bone. Nausea replaced this pain. The creamy mud smoothed into a grey haze tinted with red.

The whole phantasm vanished with a snap. George opened his eyes and looked into the face of Dr. Blake who was bending over him, a satisfied smile on his lips.

"How do you feel?" Dr. Blake asked.

All at once George realized he was f r e e of those constant parasite thoughts that had been with him since

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conditioning by the government psychologist.

"I feel free!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, I know," Dr. Blake smirked. "Now all we have to do is keep you that way. We stand a chance now."

"How?" George asked, sitting up weakly as the counter drug began to free his muscles.

Instead of answering, Dr. Blake turned to a man who had just come in carrying a black instrument box. There were earphones attached to it.

Dr. Blake placed the phones over his ears when the man set the box on the white enamel table next to the operating table where George lay. He twisted a dial rapidly, pausing at a certain reading. Closing his eyes he moved the vernier adjustment slowly. When he was satisfied he took off the phones and handed them to George.

"See if this is the right frequency," he asked quietly.

GEORGE LISTENED. Almost at once the doctor yanked the phones away.

"Not too much or it'll distort your memory of the sound," he said. "How close was it?"

"Right on the beam," George said. "Except that it didn't sound quite—velvet enough."

"That's a good description," Dr. Blake agreed "Now into your room where you can't misbehave. We've got to reproduce that sound exactly. It's a counterhypnotic."

"Too bad you failed in your plan to turn the tables on him," George said.

Dr. Blake looked at him queerly.

"Yes, it is," he agreed, his voice curiously muffled. When he continued his voice was normal. "We have a few tricks left yet. After we duplicate that sound we can build up in you the ability to get past it. They'll have to develop a new combination. We'll solve that one. Eventually we'll establish a permanent contact with this government psychologist and make him our tool just as he made you his. Without the telepathic link between you and him we couldn't do a thing."

He put a friendly grasp on George's arm and accompanied him to the small room, locking him in. The door was soundproof, with a small window in it face high. He stood looking through this while George went over and laid down on the cot.

When he turned away he was wearing a broad, delighted grin. He hurried through the operating room, along a corridor, down a flight of stairs to the level below.

The room he entered was blue with cigaret smoke in spite of the efficient air conditioning. Mr. Grent was there, stretched out on a davenport half asleep.

Only one other person was present in the room. He was a man in his early fifties. His brown hair shaded to iron grey at the temples, the whole gleaming with a soft luster. His rough skin and large nose spoke of rugged strength. He was tall and broad-shouldered, standing with an easy slouch against the bar. There was an open book on the bar beside him.

"I don't know how you do it, Craig," Blake said as he entered. "You called every turn to the last detail."

"Brandon reacted as I predicted?" Craig Calmont asked. At the doctor's nod he grunted in satisfaction.

"I've been trying to figure things out," Blake said. "You never seem to do things directly, but they always turn out the way you say they will. Why is that?"

"It's because the human race is so closely associated with the race of pigs," Craig said with deadpan ser-

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iousness. "I raised a pig once, right from the time he was six weeks old until he turned all his talents to getthing fat. I learned more about the human mentality that way, than from a lifetime study of humans."

"You mean humans are as contrary as pigs?" Dr. Blake grinned.

"Not exactly that," Graig frowned thoughtfully. "There was an old German historian, Oswald Spengler, who wrote a massive book generalizing the life histories of nations. One thing he said stuck to me. He said that the type of mind that could invent the Australian boomerang, if allowed to develop untouched by other civilizations indefinitely would have resulted in an advance civilization much different than any ever known before.

"I remember that when I was raising Percy, and studied him. He was extremely intelligent until his interests turned to food exclusively. His was a type of mind quite different than any I had ever met before. We matched wits often, and I must admit I came out second best more than once. But out of that association came the secret of what I call Tangential Semantics."

"Tangential semantics?" Dr. Blake echoed.

Mr. Grant was wide awake now, listening gravely, a twinkle in his eyes,

"You know what sematics is," Craig explained. "In a way it's a tangent away from logic. Logic says the structure of the word pattern is the most important. Semantics says the words are not what we are interested in, but the things meant by the words, the neumena. The phenomena.

"Tangential semantics starts with the premise that *every utterance and every act is an attempt at correction of a psychological maladjustment* that if a stimulus or situation does not create a maladjustment that must be corrected, there will be no reaction."

CRAIG CALMONT saw the bewildered look on the doctor's face and chuckled throatily.

"Maybe this will make it clearer," he said tolerantly. "A statement is made. It conforms to a logical pattern or skeleton. That's the logic department. The statement has a meaning built up from the meanings of the words plus the logical form. That's the semantic department. The statement is made by a mind and is the end product of the complex reactions of that mind. That is the department of tangential semantics,—or rather, the material. And action is just the same. A program, an invention, a solution to a problem, they are all just the same as a statement in that respect."

"Then tangential semantics is merely another name for applied psychology," Dr. Blake said skeptically.

"Not exactly," Craig disagreed. "You might call applied psychology a minor branch of tangential semantics. Where applied psychology establishes a form of behavior, and calls all reactions normal or abnormal, *tangential semantics calls all reactions abnormal, and asserts that all thinking is an attempt at adjustment of abnormality.*

"Then every statement and every act is symptomatic in its essence. Where logic and semantics deals only with the symptoms, *tangential semantics* goes to the root of things and *deals directly with the maladjustments that give rise to the symptoms.* And since no cure can be expected, all that can be done is alter the disease; substitute one maladjustment for another."

"Like the discovery in 1974 that innoculation of a t.b. patient with Pneumonia III cured the t.b. perman-

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ently, and the pneumonia could be cleared up then with sulfa?" Dr. Blake suggested.

"Exactly," Craig agreed. "If you don't end the process, but must have a third disease clear up the pneumonia, and then still another be necessary to clear up that, and so on."

"I can see that," Dr. Blake admitted. "But what has all that got to do with your ability to know what Brandon will do ahead of time?"

"I'll give another example," Craig said patiently. "Let's suppose that at a dinner party you say something and another guest takes issue with what you say, answering you with irrefutable logic. What do you do, assuming you think you are right and he's wrong? You argue back at him. But suppose you knew that his arguing with you was due to an upset stomach? Then your most effective rebuttal would be to give him a bicarb, wouldn't it? Once his stomach settled he would see that you were right!"

"Hmm," Dr. Blake said slowly. "I think I'm beginning to see the light."

"It's about time," Craig said. "I can't live forever, and if I can't get a few competent disciples to teach, and pass on my heritage of wisdom acquired from the study of a young pig, Democracy will die out completely in another generation."

He turned his back on the doctor and busied himself with the intricacies of making a rouell gin from the stores of drinks in neat rows along the back of the bar.

A smile twisted at the corners of Dr. Blake's mouth as he gazed fondly at the broad back of the giant.

"How about making me one too?" he asked softly.

The back of Craig's head nodded. The doctor stood looking absently while his mind mulled over what he had learned.

"Here's another angle," he said suddenly. "Suppose he *didn't* have an upset stomach. Than I could win the argument by giving him one, maybe."

"You're catching on fast," Craig laughed. "That's exactly what I did to Brandon, the government psychologist, when you followed out my orders correctly."

"Now I see why it's called tangential," Dr. Blake said.

"Do you?" Craig asked enigmatically, handing the doctor his drink. "By the way, Mr. Grant, your daughter seems to be in love with this young man we've dangled in front of the government."

"She is," Mr. Grant replied without moving from his position of relaxation on the davenport.

Craig Calmont looked at the recumbent figure, a disturbed expression on his face.

"You really have a lot of confidence in me, don't you," he said, subdued.

He drank his rouell gin noisily and set the glass down, picking up the book he had been reading before Dr. Blake came in.

"Guess I'll retire to my workshop," he said gruffly.

GEORGE awoke from a sound sleep with the feeling that someone was in the small room with him. Gradually he realized that this impression came from the parasite voices in his mind. One voice, really. It was the thoughts of the telepath atuned to his mind and directed by the government psychologist.

It was telling him to take the bottom button off his shirt. Suddenly he knew the reason for this. He got off the cot and went toward the door, pulling the button loose as he went.

He dropped it into the keyhole, then fished in a pocket until he found a small capsule. It was half full of a green liquid. He took the top off the

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capsule and poured the liquid against the button and stepped to one side.

There was no explosion. The heat was tremendous. George watched a trifle unbelievingly as he saw the button melt the lock and continue melting downward. In a vague way he knew that the chemicals were a catalyst that caused iron and oxygen to combine fiercely at room temperature. With the part of his mind that was loyal to the underground he wished he could have saved that chemical for them to analyze. It was a top government secret.

He pushed open the ruined door. Melted steel and glowing slag sparked as he stepped through into the empty hallway. The air was getting acrid and harsh. He coughed continually.

Where was he going? He paused and tried to think. His head turned this way and that as he tried to make up his mind. The parasite thoughts were gone. In their place was only bewilderment.

He noticed vaguely a glowing spot on the wall opposite the door he had just opened. As he looked the glowing spot burst into flame.

It was that catalyst again. It was evaporating and then condensing in a cool spot, starting another ferrous fire. It would keep on doing that.

It would keep on doing that! The realization of what that meant was an icy bath to his bewildered mind. He had to find someone and tell them of the danger.

He shouted as he ran. Almost at once people were surrounding him. He gasped out what had happened through a raw throat.

He felt a needle prick his arm...

"I TELL YOU I didn't know what it would do," George repeated for the tenth time. "I just knew, without knowing how I knew, that I could melt the lock by sticking the bottom button of my shirt in the keyhole and pouring the liquid in the capsule on the button. It never occured to me that the stuff was an indestructible catalyst that would evaporate from the heat and condense in other places, evaporate again and condense again, and burn up the whole place."

Craig looked up from the intercom grimly. Mr. Grant returned the look with one just as grim.

"We have the hospital section sealed off now," Mr. Grant said. "It isn't a perfectly gas tight seal, though. As the iron oxide cools and condenses, a vacuum is being built up. That will draw more air into the sealed off part to feed the corrosion. In a week it'll break out into the rest of the structure. We'll have to abandon this place entirely."

Craig shook his head.

"Maybe not," he said "I have two tanks of hydrogen in my workshop. I'll drill a hole through the wall and fill the compartment with hydrogen gas. The two tanks should make several pounds pressure in there, and the pressure being higher inside will reverse the leakage and cause hydrogen to seep out instead of oxygen to seep in. We can get more tanks and keep the pressure up around five pounds in there and hold off the action of that devilish catalyst indefinitely."

"What about the oxygen already in there?" Mr. Grant objected. "With a few hotspots left won't it combine with the hydrogen and explode?"

"We'll have to risk that," Craig said. "If it doesn't explode, or the explosion doesn't break open the compartment, the hydrogen will ensure the exhaustion of the oxygen. I can insert a spark tube in the hole I bore and keep a spark playing. That way if there's enough oxgen left in there to cause an explosion it will produce a flame right at the source."

"O.K., Craig," Mr. Grant said. His face creased into a tired smile.

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"Looks like you're not the only one adept at tangential semanticism. They kept us occupied with our schemes while they quietly waited to do the very simple thing they planned—get George to use that button and capsule and burn us out."

Craig nodded.

"They can't come in or bomb us out, even though they know exactly where we are," he admitted. "The permaloy armor will hold them back till doomsday. Not even diamond drills can touch it. An oxy-hydrogen flame just warms it. An explosion could lift it off the planet without cracking it."

"I'll get busy on that hydrogen setup," Craig excused himself.

Fifteen minutes later the whine of an electric drill sounded. Mr. Grant, sitting near the intercom, seemed asleep.

Joan came into the room silently. She looked down at her father affectionately and ran her fingers through his hair.

"Kritt almost got us this time, Joan," Mr. Grant said without moving.

"He'll never get us, dad," she said confidently. "Not with you, and Craig, and all the rest."

He lifted a hand. She took it and squeezed it reassuringly.

Dr. Blake's voice came over the intercom.

"What'll we do with George now?" he asked.

"Go ahead as planned," Mr. Grant said. "Tell him to think nothing of the little damage that button from his shirt did. Tell him it was a childish attempt and failed because we already knew about the catalyst and had a counter agent on hand."

"Yes, sir," Dr. Blake's voice came respectfully.

Mr. Grant opened his eyes and smiled at Joan.

"Bring me a cold lunch and Plato, Joan," he said. "I feel like immersing myself in the past when the Earth was innocent and men were simple souls to whom a lie was a sin instead of a tool, and logic had as its field the discovery of truth."

Joan turned and left the room. Her father watched her go, his thoughts drifting toward Plato.

IN PLATO'S day you said, "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore Socrates is mortal." Then Hitler came along and laid down the principle that if you tell a big enough lie there will be a fair percentage of the population who will believe it on the assumption that where there's smoke there must be fire. Communism had come of age in the ashes of Hitler's pyre and incorporated his philosophy into their own dialectical materialism, creating the rudiments of tangential tactics where you never seem to aim at your real objective so your opponent will never really know where you're going. They had more or less unconsciously used tangential semantics in its broader form, analyzing the weaknesses of the western civilization and playing on them.

But dialectic materialism had itself had a basic weakness that far outweighed the weaknesses of the western capitalistic society. Marx had recognized that weakness and taken it into account when he asserted that the aim of the dictatorship must be primarily toward the education of the masses to become a democracy.

So communism had failed miserably with the collapse of the Kremlin. Out of its ashes had come something even more diabolical than all its predecessors. It was a refinement of them. It was the science and art of propaganda, the art of hypnotism, and the new theory of psychology,

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all blended into one.

With the elevation of the lie to the same status as the truth, and with the discovery that the human mind never forgets a thing, but that all forgotten things remain in the subconscious as determining factors, democracy itself had finally fallen.

The human masses had become finally what they really were—a test tube full of dumb matter to be played with by skilled chemists who knew the alchemy of the mind. The dream of democracy remained now only as an impurity in the test tube. An impurity which might soon develop into a bacterial growth under the life-giving effects of tangential semantics as the answer to psychosemantics, the control instrument of the new dictatorship.

At times it was a little confusing in a fearful sort of way. The whole thing was getting too complicated for anyone except a mental giant like Craig to deal with. In another few generations unless tangential semantics tore down the whole complex structure it would be too late.

Already the dictatorship of the psychologists was turning to specialization of functions and breeding of specialized types of humans. The telepaths were being sorted from the masses all the time and being interbred to create a race of super-telepaths.

The masses were being herded toward a standard I. Q. of ninety-five where they were intelligent enough for a mechanical civilization and unintelligent enough to be handled without trouble.

Sometimes the struggle against it seemed hopeless. It was at those times that Mr. Grant felt the urge to turn to Plato and bathe in the naive faith in simple thinking that was so classically written there.

About the same time rouell was discovered as the substitute for alcohol, and ersatz drinks could be turned out as cheaply as cokes in minutes instead of after an aging period, deductive logic had fallen to its low estate where it was merely a cataloguing system for ideas.

Plato in his triumphant dissertation on the syllogism had been a child, proud of his ability to find a book on a library shelf. He had conveniently relegated the writing of the book to Divine Power, and contented himself with the cataloguing.

To him, and to his successors right down to the last half of the twentieth century, man had been a thinking creature, to be treated with dignity and to have his thoughts countered by thoughts. Then it had been discovered that thoughts were merely symptomatic of psychic maladjustment, incurable but maneuverable.

IT HAD, of course, been known by a few of the great in each generation from the dawn of time. Webster, the lawyer, had won a case without a shred of evidence by playing on the fears of the defendant, accused of murder. In his historic speech he had conceded victory for the defense. He had said, "He has done the deed. No eye has seen him, no ear has heard him. The secret is his own, and it is safe."

Then he had painted a picture of a universe of eyes and ears waiting for the faintest whisper, the slightest movement, dictated by a guilty conscience. In two minutes the sneeringly confident d e f e n d a n t had changed into a cringing coward, tortured by the very thought of living with himself. He had confessed.

Webster had been at times a tangential semanticist. Because he was ahead of his time he was considered

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a genius with mysterious powers, symbolized by the story of his outsmarting the devil himself.

Somewhere in all that heritage from the native past, when men were direct and open in their thought and deed, lay the key to the present situation.

Just what were the forces fighting for democracy? They were a few million slaves of the state, hiding their beliefs behind innocent expressions, waiting and ready to act when the time came—only it never came. They were a few figure heads like himself hiding in impregnable underground fortresses built by the last democratic government when it foresaw its doom and prepared to go underground rather than stay and face execution for treason to a State that had not yet existed when their "crimes" were committed...

"Here you are, dad," Joan's musical voice interrupted Mr. Grant's discouraged thoughts. She laid the colorful tray with its white slices of bread, red sliced ham, blue design on white dishes, steaming rich brown coffee, and polished silver on the table beside him. The well worn Plato on the tray was the only thing not fresh and harmonious.

"Thank you dear," Mr. Grant said.

"Smile, dad," Joan said sweetly. "That's the only thanks I want. Just to see you smile a little."

He smiled at her. Then he took the Plato and looked at it as at a thing in itself. He moved his arm as if to throw the book against the far wall, hesitated, and tossed the book out of sight on a nearby chair.

"Sit down on the arm of my chair and keep me company," he said. "I prefer you to Plato as an escape right now."

She complied, resting her bare arm on his shoulders while he chewed slowly on a bite of ham sandwich. Her presence soothed him and quieted his thoughts.

He wondered how Craig was coming with the hydrogen tanks. He should have just about everything under control by now.

He wondered how Dr. Blake was coming in the game of wits with Bradon via telepathy, with George as the pawn.

It all seemed so—small. It musn't seem that way or he would give up the struggle. Great things were never accomplished except by attention to small things—the saving of headquarters by figuring out how to use a couple of tanks of hydrogen to hold back the most diabolically successful attack yet devised—the patient attempt to install certain beliefs in the minds of the government telepaths and psychologists that could eventually be used to advantage, and the incidental collecting of information about them and through them in their unguarded reactions.

Joan sat motionless, her eyes fondly worshiping the top of her father's head. To her he was a mountain of strength in spite of his small stature. His quiet, almost expressionless face always carried the serenity of inner strength. He seldon spoke, but when he did his words outweighed those of even Craig Calmont who was the most brilliant man alive.

SHE LOVED George Brown mainly because she saw duplicated in him many of those qualities she saw in her father. Where those qualities were lacking in George she excused them by saying he would have them by the time he was as old as her father.

She had a supreme faith that everything would turn out as her father desired it to. She had to have faith, or be miserable in a welter of uncer-

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tain, incomprehensive, apparently meaningless activities.

Things weren't done sensibly. She had a vague impression of a stage on which the actors ran around shouting meaningless phrases, doing senseless things—only to do the one thing they had intended doing all along at some unexpected moment, and seemingly as an afterthought without warning or any true indication of their intention.

More than once she had seen later, much later, that every senseless act had been carefully planned and executed for a definite purpose—like the act she had been carefully rehearsed on where she pleaded with her father not to shoot George when he had no intention of shooting him anyway.

She bent over and caressed her father's greying hair with her cheek, unaware of his feeling of hopeless discouragement and his growing conviction that nothing could ever come of the present course except eventual defeat.

That caress, its addition to the complex state of idea and emotion in the mind of Mr. Grant, resulted in an idea so completely absurd and insane that dictator Kritt and his government could have no possible defense or counter-idea.

It didn't spring full blown into his mind, nor could his background have made it possible for him to develop the idea into a full plan. That could be done only by Craig Calmont with his mastery of tangential semantics and his ability to plan a course of action in which the true objective lay hidden under dozens of layers of logically developed pseudo-objectives, each specifically tailored to affect certain people in certain ways necessary to the success of the real objective.

Craig opened the door and started to come in. He stopped and turned back.

"Come on in, Craig," Mr. Grant called.

"I'll get you something to eat," Joan said brightly.

"I *am* hungry," Craig admitted, falling into a comfortable chair. "I still have half a tank of hydrogen left, Mr. Grant. The way pressure holds it should be enough for several days; but we should get a few tanks just in case."

Joan left the room to fix a sandwich for Craig. Mr. Grant watched her leave and then turned to Craig.

"I've something on my mind," he said. "And for once I don't quite know how to express it."

"Well, why don't you just try, then?" Craig said with a smile.

"If you don't understand," Mr. Grant said seriously, "it will sound like defeatism or treason to the cause."

"Oh?" Craig chided. "Sounds intriguing. O.K., I'll withold judgment until you say you're through."

"WOULD you call a president a dictator?" Mr. Grant asked suddenly.

"Of course not," Craig answered, surprised. "He is elected by the people."

"He has dictatorial powers," Mr. Grant argued.

"Certainly," Craig agreed. "Given to him by Congress and the people."

"But he knows how to sway the people so they vote for him," Mr. Grant objected. "He uses his great gift of oratory. The election is just a form that has to be gone through."

"What are you driving at?" Craig asked.

"I'm trying to determine just what a dictator is," Mr. Grant said simply.

"A dictator is a man or a group that keeps control of a government

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by force against the public will, and imposes his dictates on the country by force," Craig defined.

"Why?" Mr. Grant asked. "Why doesn't he hold an election," and be voted into office?"

"Because he wouldn't be voted into office in a fair election," Craig replied.

"Then the only difference between Kritt and a president," Mr. Grant said triumphantly, "is Kritt wouldn't be maintained in office if there were an election at any time. Right?"

"There are other differences," Craig said, frowning. "For example, those who are against a president are not hunted down and put in labor camps or killed."

"If their avowed purpose was to overthrow the government and oust him by force they would have been arrested and tried as traitors," Mr. Grant countered.

"But a president is legally elected in the first place," Craig objected. "And Kritt was not."

"I know, I know," Mr. Grant smiled. "Now let's just suppose something. Let's suppose that all of a sudden our organization were to change over and everyone of us become a staunch supporter of Kritt, more sincere and loyal than his henchmen, enthusiastically supporting and aiding his every decree."

"Are you crazy?" Craig exclaimed.

"Oh, no. No," Mr. Grant said calmly. "I'm just supposing. What position would that place Kritt in?"

"Why that would—" Craig's face broke into a smile. "For one thing he would have to find some other source for his slave labor battalions, because his former source of material would then become his most loyal admirers. Naturally he couldn't take people who backed him obviously and enthusiastically, because that would encourage treason and punish loyalty."

"And eventually he would see the wisdom of replacing opportunists who played the winning side with loyal supporters," Mr. Grant said calmly.

"Eventually his strong arm squad which had kept him in power would be the only threat left to him," Craig almost whispered. Suddenly he gasped, started to choke, and then laughed gustily. When he quieted down he said, "I was just picturing his goons when they captured underground propaganda sheets and discovered them more enthusiastic for Kritt than the censored government newspapers. What a predicament that would place them in. They would appear silly punishing the men for disturbing them without a license!"

HE LOOKED thoughtfully into space and sobered as he appeared to consider things.

"But's what's this all driving at?" he asked seriously. "It's a very funny thought, full of ludicrous situations; but surely you can't be serious. The way to end a dictatorship and restore democracy is certainly not to agree with the dictator."

"Then I'm laying down a new principle," Mr. Grant said deliberately. "The way to end a dictatorship is to agree with the dictator so emphatically that *he* will have to agree with you."

He motioned for silence as he saw Craig was about to object, and continued.

"While you were shooting hydrogen into that compartment I was thinking, perhaps a little more clearly than usual," he said. "I began to see how futile our schemes are in the long run. All we're doing is existing. Holding out until the day when the dictatorship weakens so we can step in. Meanwhile Kritt is having no

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interference with his molding of the new generation. Our influence is weakening daily. Our members are depleted to fill the ranks of slave laborers. We, the leaders, are being contained underground, figuratively and literally.

"We are trying to teach reason to the existing government, a permanent fifth column, constant sabotage, and obstructionism. To what end? To the end that when a man is in power who has been chosen by the people, the people will obey the law, co-operate with the government, work for the common good, and live at peace with one another; considering as criminals all who refuse to do that. Couldn't we much better accomplish our ends by temporarily considering Kritt as our 'chosen' ruler, and working with him and for him? How could he counter such methods? Even if he knew our plan?"

When Craig made no reply he went on.

"The dialectical materialism that forms the basis of a dictatorship predicates an opposition as a permanent part of the pattern. It can allow for no peace. So if the enemy agrees all down the line, there is no opposition, and the whole thing degenerates into a farce which leaves the dictator fighting his own henchmen because he no longer needs them to protect him from the downtrodden masses, All his goals are achieved by the help of his enemies. There has never yet been a dictatorship that rose to power and stayed there by killing off its supporters."

"What a dream!" Craig said softly. "To support and obey the government in power. That would forever make dictatorship meaningless, for when it succeeded in gaining power it would lose its opposition. Even in the worst dictatorship there are people who are free and who enjoy life. They are the ones who are loyal to the leader."

He glanced keenly at Mr. Grant.

"The only fly in the ointment is to convince the seventeen million of the underground movement," he said dryly. "How could we do that?"

Mr. Grant smiled confidently.

"I think we can do that easily," he said. "You see, I took a wire recording of this conversation. We can have it written and pick out the essential features. We can sell our district chiefs on it and they can sell the rest."

Craig glanced at the intercom and saw the recorder toggle down. He smiled.

"This may as well go on the wire then," he said. "Perfect obedience to existing authority is the basis of all democracy. Without that no democracy can exist, regardless of the form of the government in power."

Joan appeared with another tray of food. The two men were silent as they contemplated the future. Craig smiled his thanks to her. She turned and left.

"One thing," Craig said after several minutes of silence. "We have to play this carefully. Your name must appear on each pro-Kritt pamphlet, and over a long period of time. We must make sure the government manages to 'capture' some of each batch of pamphlets.

"In a year's time that way you can go out into the open and receive Kritt's thanks in public. The poor sap probably won't know what struck him. He'll be the most bewildered dictator in history!"

The two men chuckled.

CRAIG locked and bolted the door to his private apartment in the underground headquarters. He crossed the carpeted floor to a closet.

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His broad shoulders pushed the row of hanging clothes against the back wall as he squeezed in and closed the door behind him.

The floor of the closet was already dropping. Two minutes later it stopped level with a narrow passage that led straight as far as the eye could see.

He walked along this narrow tunnel for ten minutes until he came to another small platform. He was now several blocks from the headquarters of the underground.

This was the exit used only in extreme emergency. Only he and Mr. Grant knew of its existence. The lift carried him up into a dirty, unused basement. Five minutes later he was walking along the sidewalk, the bright sun causing his eyes to squint.

He turned in at a drugstore and used a phone booth for several minutes. It was the last booth of a bank of a dozen, with people coming and going in a steady stream.

He used the phone once, briefly, dialling a number and then merely saying "Hello" into the receiver when the phone at the other end was connected, and hanging up.

When he came out his face was considerably altered. His nose was thinner, his skin smoother. He looked younger by twenty years. There was an almost military precision to his stride as he left the drugstore and hailed a taxi.

The taxi took him to a government airport. A plane was waiting, its motors idling. It took off at once, heading east toward Washington.

Craig slept while the plane was in the air, a smile of contentment on his altered face. Two hours later the plane landed on the Washington field. A government limousine was waiting for him. Its siren wailed as it sped through traffic to the Capitol Building.

Plain clothes agents escorted him through a side entrance and along a luxurious hall to a small door. One of them went ahead and knocked. The door was open so that Craig didn't have to interrupt his stride.

When he stepped through the door the agents remained behind.

It was a huge room, with a deep oriental carpet, historic paintings on the walls, and a solitary desk at the far end. Behind the desk sat the heavy figure of dictator Kritt, a smile of welcome on his square face.

Craig saluted smartly, then returned the smile.

"Come in. Come in," Kritt said expansively. "It's good to see you again so soon. Let's see."

He touched a finger to his chin thoughtfully.

"It's been almost six months, hasn't it?" he asked.

Craig nodded.

"And how did this tangential sementics work?" Kritt asked jokingly. "Did you convince Grant that the most successful way to lick me was to boot me upstairs in public opinion?" He chuckled throatily. "Honestly, Craig," he added. "That's the most insane scheme I ever heard of. I hope you've given up the idea and are ready to do a little work around here."

"I convinced him," Craig said.

"What!" Kritt exclaimed, rising and coming around his desk. "How did you do it? Wasn't he suspicious, the idea coming from you? Oh, of course I had Brandon co-operate with you so they'd think you were a superman able to control the enemy's thoughts. But even so it would take a crazy man to believe that the way to lick his enemy was to become his best friend. The minute you broached the subject he would become suspicious."

"I didn't broach the subject, as you

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put it," Craig said. "I just instilled the factors and created the situations that would make him realize the futility of his long range program, and get the idea all by himself. That is tangential semanticism in action."

"He—" Kritt choked on his cigar. "He got the idea all by himself? Then you of course argued against it to entrench it in his mind?"

Craig nodded.

Dictator Kritt stared at him for a full minute. A look of suspicion dawned in his eyes.

"Say," he said. "It wouldn't be that you're using a little of this tangential semanticism on me, would it?"

Craig grinned at him mockingly. Then he said, "Why of course not, dad..."

IS YOUR STOMACH UNHOOKED?

☆ By J. R. Marks ☆

ONE OF the conveniences of homoeopathic magic is that it allows the cure to be performed on the doctor instead of on the patient. The peasants of Perche, in France believe that nausea and much vomiting is caused by the stomach coming unhooked. So they call in the doctor who takes down all the symptoms and then throws himself into the most awful contortions and expressions of pain for the purpose of unhooking his own stomach. When he feels that this has been accomplished, he proceeds to hook it up again by going through a similar act. His face regains its calm expression as he works his way back to normal. The patient is supposed to experience corresponding relief.

In much the same manner a Dyak medicine man who has been called in on a case will lie down and pretend to be dead. The people of the family treat him like a corpse and wrap him up in mats and drag him outside on the ground. After some time has gone by, they call in more medicine men who loosen the mats from the pretended dead man and proceed to bring him back to life. As he recovers, the patient is expected to recover also. This type of treatment might be satisfactory in the treatment of a hypochondriac, but it is doubtful if it would have any effect on an acute appendicitis.

THE VICTORY DANCE

☆ By Leslie Phelps ☆

WHEN THE warriors of a superstitious tribe go off to battle, it is only natural for the friends and relatives at home to resort to any means of magic that would further insure their loved ones' safety. When the warriors of British Columbia were away fighting, the women performed ritual dances at regular intervals. They threw long pointed sticks forward symbolizing stabbing the enemy, and they drew hooked sticks backward, meaning they were drawing their men back to safety. They painted their faces a blood-red, and prayed to the weapons to keep their husbands safe from danger. After the dances were over the women hid their weapons for a few days. When they took them out again, if they found hair or piece of scalp on them, they knew that a husband had killed an enemy. But if blood was found on a weapon, that wife knew that her husband was killed.

The women of some tribes would dance all the time their husbands were away to keep them from getting tired. Among the strange customs of the Haida women was the one of getting up early in the morning to play war. The mothers would attack their children and pretend to take them as slaves. This ritual was designed to help their husbands deal similarly with the enemy. For the first ten days that the husbands were away, the wives lay with their heads pointing in the direction to which the warriors had paddled away in their canoes. Then they turned their heads the other way, for their husbands were supposed to be on their way home. The Carib Indians of Orinoca were a bit more brutal in carrying out their superstitions. When their warriors had gone away to battle, the friends and relatives left at home tried to calculate as well as they could the exact moment when the absent warriors would be attacking the enemy. Then they took two young boys and tied them to a bench and proceeded to give them a terrible beating on their naked backs. The youths submitted to this without crying out, because they were instilled with the firm belief that their suffering and fortitude with which they withstood the ordeal contributed to the success of their elders in battle.

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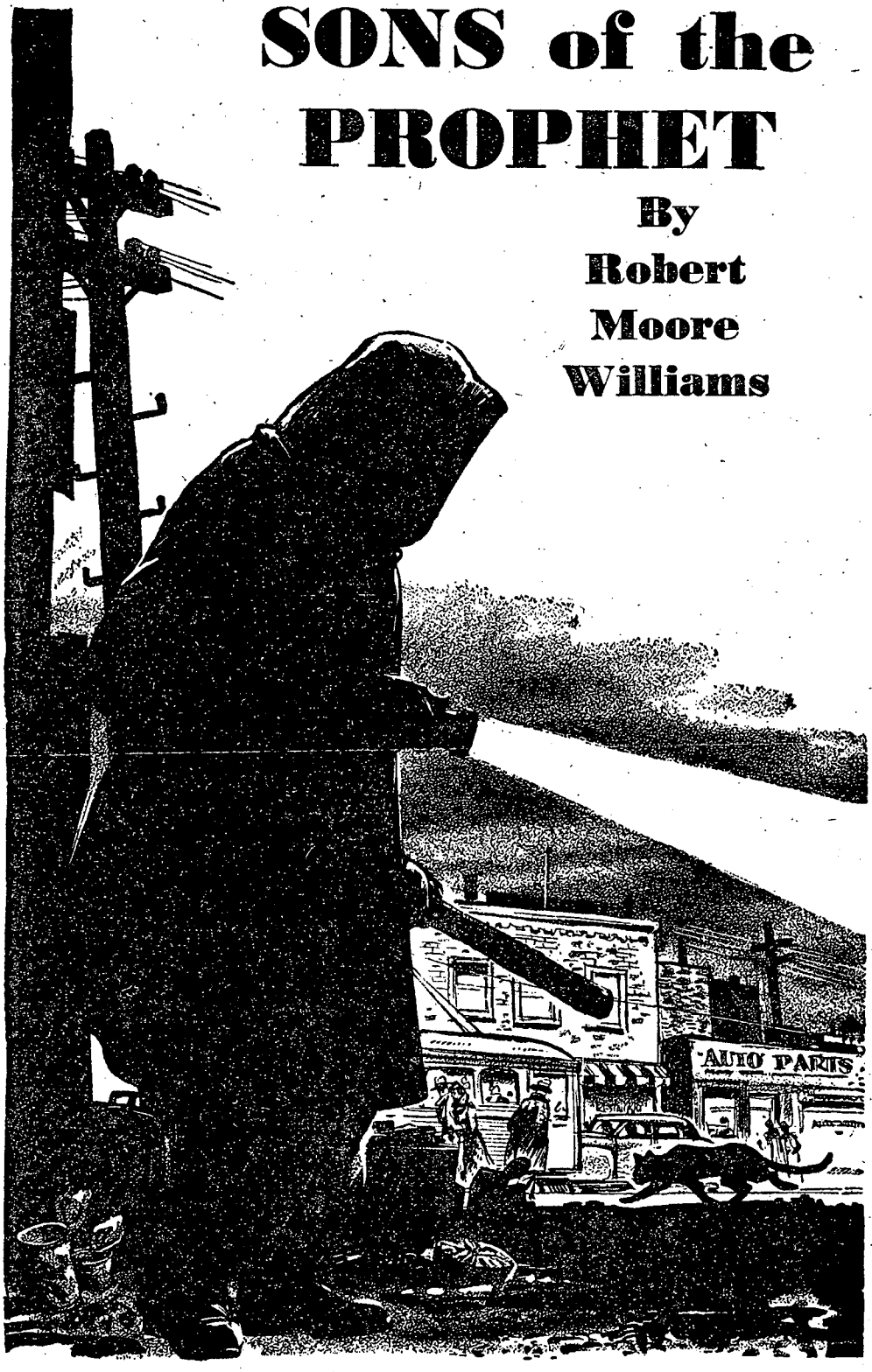
SONS of the PROPHET

By Robert Moore Williams



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There was a strange quality about the Prophet that made his subjects puppets to his commands — even to welcoming death . . .

"SEEK PEACE with the prophet," the black-garbed deacon said piously.

"That's what I'm doing," Art Lawson answered quickly.

"And you're going to get it, bud," the deacon said.

Smack!

Art Lawson saw the fist coming at him. He ducked his chin down below his left arm and took the deacon's fist on his left elbow, a jarring blow that sent flashes of pain through his arm.

"So I'm going to get it, am I?" Art Lawson said.

With a right cross that had the kick of a mule in it, he clipped the deacon on the point of the chin. The deacon's head snapped back. Pad-

The Deacons knew their business. They kicked him in the face, in the ribs — and finally his consciousness faded . . .

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dling backward, the deacon hit the ground.

"One deacon down," Art Lawson thought with satisfaction. One deacon from three deacons left two deacons. Art was turning to give his attention to the other two when the second deacon hit him behind the ear. The third deacon tripped him. He fell. When he hit the ground, both deacons began kicking him.

For deacons, they revealed a remarkably extensive knowledge of the finer points of kicking hell out of a man who was down.

Only, of course, they weren't regular deacons.

They were the Prophet's deacons.

They were part of the Prophet's strong-arm squads.

They knew their business. They kicked holy hell out of Lawson. They kicked him in the face; they kicked him in the ribs; they kicked him in the belly; then they kicked him in the head.

"Peace to the Prophet," one of them piously said, when they had finished kicking the prostrate man.

"And stay to hell away from this Paradise," the second one added. "If we catch you around here again, we'll start in where we're leaving off this time."

The deacon whom Lawson had clipped on the chin got to his feet.

"That goes double for me," he said, kicking the prostrate man in the back.

LAWSON vaguely heard the deacons walk out of the alley. They were gone but he didn't know whether or not he wanted to get up. He didn't know whether he *could* get up. The effort made him hurt all over. He cursed silently.

Directly down the alley from him and four blocks away across the street, he could see a big apartment house. It was a fancy building. Thirty stories high, it sat directly on the lake front in South Chicago.

On top of the building was a huge neon sign which announced to the world:

Seek PEACE with the PROPHET.

The apartment building was worth several million dollars.

It was owned by the Prophet.

It was his major paradise.

Followers of the Prophet lived in this apartment building. The three top floors were reserved for his favorites, both men and women. The Prophet himself lived in a penthouse on the roof.

In Chicago, the Prophet was an enigma. Although many newspaper and feature stories had been written about him and his growing legions of followers, most of them in a tone of derision, not even the keenest reporter had been able to discover the truth about this man. And not even the most denunciatory articles, attacking the Prophet in the bitterest of terms, calling him a false prophet, hinting that his paradises were very close to the other end of the scale, stating that his organization was very close to the other end of the scale, had ever drawn a word of reply from him or shaken the conviction of one of his followers.

His followers never deserted and never questioned his actions. They turned every dime of their earnings into his treasury, got food, clothing, lodging, and medical care in return. Or so he said. Nothing was ever said about the quality of the necessities he gave his followers but since no follower had ever complained about his treatment, or realized that he was an abject slave instead of a free man, the authorities had no grounds for taking action against

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him.

The Prophet went his merry way, growing richer, stronger, and more of a menace every day

* * *

Art Lawson got slowly to his feet. He stood there in the alley, a big, young man with a face darkened by anger, glaring at the sign in the sky. Cars whispered along the asphalt of the Outer Drive. An elevated train rattled along 63rd street. An airport bound air-liner blinked landing lights in the sky overhead.

This was Chicago of the twentieth century, yet he was looking at a modern thirty-story apartment building filled with slaves. In a world of airplanes and atomic energy, a sign in the sky said:

Seek PEACE with the PROPHET.

Maybe, he thought, you could find peace with the Prophet, if you were one of the Prophet's followers, but if you demanded information concerning one of the Prophet's recent converts, and insisted on getting that information, you got the deacons instead. And the deacons, as Art Lawson could testify, were far from being peaceful.

He walked slowly out of the alley. The deacons had returned to the apartment paradise.

Down the street, a sign said

EAT

It was an all-night hamburger joint. Lawson entered. "Could I use your washroom?" he asked.

The counterman, a 20-year old youth with the stamp of adolescence still on his face, looked incuriously at the bruises on Lawson's face, at his torn and dirty clothes. "I guess so," the counterman grudged in a sullen tone of voice.

Lawson washed his face, straightened his tie, and brushed some of the dust off his clothes. Feeling his chest tenderly, he decided that no ribs were broken, even if they did feel as if they were.

"Someday I'll find me a deacon all by himself somewhere," he thought, as his probing fingers found another sore spot. He went back into the lunchroom.

TWO MEN were seated at different ends of the counter. Neither paid any attention to him. He sat down beside the nearest one. "Coffee," he said.

"Bees don't drink coffee," the man sitting beside him said, in an accusing tone of voice as if Lawson, in ordering the java, had done something wrong.

"Huh?" Lawson said. For a moment, he was startled. He looked quickly at the man, saw a vacant face and an intent pair of pathetic brown eyes that looked at him and through him and obviously did not really see him. "What's that?" the man asked.

A nut, Lawson instantly decided. Cracked but harmless. Chicago, and all big cities, had their fair share of little men who were wacky in the upper story.

"Bees?" he said, thoughtfully. "Afraid I don't." The tone of his voice discouraged conversation.

The bee man was not easily discouraged. He wanted to talk and he was going to talk. "You should know about them," he said. "They are marvelous creatures. The life of the hive is a model of communal perfection. Each individual bee has his own work to do. Some guard the hive, others gather honey, while still others take care of the hive. The whole hive, of course, is ruled by the queen."

"So I've heard," Lawson said. He didn't feel like talking to a nut about bees.

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The counterman set his coffee before him.

"Do you know anything about the Prophet?" Lawson asked him. Working here in the shadow of the Prophet's major Paradise, this kid might know something important. The chances were he didn't know anything beyond the standing of the White Sox and the Cubs, but he *might.*

"Sure, I know things about him," the counterman promptly answered. His sullen face brightened.

"What, for instance, do you know?" Lawson asked.

"He's the greatest man on earth," the counterman said.

Lawson burned his mouth with too big a swallow of coffee. "That might be a matter of opinion," he hazarded.

"No opinion about it," the youth vigorously replied. "It's a fact and that's all there is to it."

"How do you know it's a fact?" Lawson questioned.

"I know it *here,*" the counterman answered. He clasped his right hand over his heart and turned his eyes upward. The tone of his voice was bright with conviction and with fanatacism.

Lawson was silent.

"And if you don't believe it, you had better look out," the counterman continued, his voice hardening. "I know there are people who say bad things about him now but the day is coming when nobody will say anything bad about him. The day is coming when the whole country, the whole world, will know how big he is."

"Well, I'm damned!" Lawson gasped. "You talk like a follower of his."

"I am!" The counterman said firmly.

IN ASTONISHMENT, Lawson stared at him. The kid with the pimples, this counterman in a hamburger joint, was a follower of the Prophet! And not only a follower, but a firm believer, a fanatic of the first order! Lawson wondered if all the Prophet's followers were so firmly convinced as this one seemed to be. The accounts he had read in the newspaper had emphasized the number of rich people who had joined the Prophet. They had contributed all their wealth upon joining, which had given Lawson the impression that the Prophet was strictly out for the dough.

But this kid behind the counter didn't have any money. He couldn't be earning more than twenty dollars a week. In spite of this, he was one of the Prophet's men. Or so he claimed. Lawson saw no reason to doubt his statement.

"About the bees, now," the man on his left began again. "You really ought to study the wonderful instinct that controls the bees in the hive. Only it really isn't an instinct —Aren't you interested."

Lawson had risen from his stool. "Some other time you can tell me about the bees," he said kindly. "Right now I've got some heavy thinking to do."

The bee man brightened visibly. "Oh, thank you," he said. "Yes, indeed. Some other time we can have a wonderful talk—"

Lawson was already gone out of the hamburger joint. For the first time, he began to realize the extremely serious nature of the problem facing him.

As Lawson left the eat place, the man who had remained seated at the far end of the counter, listening to the talk, rose to his feet and sauntered out behind him. The man was

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wearing a shapeless gray felt hat, which he kept well pulled down over furtive, alert eyes.

Lawson did not know he was being followed until he heard a voice say behind him:

"I want to talk to you."

Turning he saw that Gray Hat stood beside him. Vaguely he remembered Gray Hat as having been in the hamburger joint. Under the street lights, Gray Hat looked like the kind of guy who stops you and asks you for a match.

"What do you want?" Lawson said.

"I want to know why you were asking those questions about the Prophet," Gray Hat answered.

"What business is this of yours?" Lawson answered.

"It may be my business, it may not," Gray Hat answered calmly. His eyes went over Lawson's clothes, not missing the dusty spots of the bruise on his face. "Anybody who has had a disagreement with the deacons may be my business," he added.

"What makes you think I had trouble with the deacons? Maybe I got hit by a car."

"Could be," Gray Hat agreed. "And it could be that this is the work of the deacons. Am I right?"

"If you're right, what of it?"

"Oh, nothing much," Gray Hat evaded. "Except that any man who has had trouble with the deacons is a friend of ours." There was sincerity in the tone of his voice.

"What's your name?"

"Cromwell," Gray Hat answered.

"Okay, Cromwell," Lawson said. "I don't know what your game is but I had trouble with the deacons. So what? If you've got something on your mind, spill it."

"It's what you've got on your mind that interests me," Cromwell answered. "Why did you have trouble with the deacons? Believe me, friend, I'm not asking just to hear my head rattle."

Hesitating, Lawson meditated that Cromwell might belong to the Prophet's order too. The counterman had belonged. It was hard to tell who was a member and who wasn't. Cromwell might be trying to trap him into talking too much. On the other hand, there was something about the alert little man that he liked.

CROMWELL seemed to sense what the other was thinking. "I'm not one of the Prophet's men. Quite the contrary! Now if you will only tell me why you had trouble with the deacons, and if you're willing to do something about it, maybe we can get together."

Again the note of sincerity sounded in Cromwell's voice. Hearing it, Art Lawson hesitated no longer. "All right, I'll tell you why I had trouble with the deacons. I went in that Paradise down the street and started asking questions."

"Ah!" Cromwell mused. "And they didn't want to answer?"

"No, they were willing to answer. They were even willing to let me talk to the—ah, person I was asking the questions about. They did let me talk to her, but after I talked, I guess I kind of lost my head. I tried to use force in taking her away from Paradise." He shook his head as sharp and painful memories came flooding into his mind. "That was where the deacons stepped into the picture."

"I see," Cromwell said sympathetically. "A friend of yours has joined the Prophet's order. You tried to take her away. Is that it?"

Lawson nodded.

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"And the deacons threw you out," Cromwell continued.

"Yes, except the person who joined the Prophet's order was not exactly a friend—"

"No?"

"It was a girl. In fact—it was my fiance."

"Oh!" Sudden swift sympathy flooded in Cromwell's voice.

"We were going to be married next month," Lawson continued. Bitterness sounded in his voice. "Then last week she—she—"

"Joined the Prophet?"

"Yes,"

"And broke your engagement?"

"Yes. She wrote me a friendly note saying goodbye and telling me what she was doing."

"And you discovered she was now living in the big apartment house down the street?"

"Yes."

"You went there and demanded to talk to her?"

"Yes, They didn't object to me in the lobby. When she broke the engagement, I sort of had the impression she hadn't been acting of her own free will, that pressure of some kind was being used on her. I wanted to talk to her, I wanted to hear her tell me with her own lips that we were—finished."

As he remembered Nina Farrel, there was bewilderment in his voice. Nina, of the soft eyes and the perfect olive complexion. They had been very much in love with each other, so much that it dazed him to think about it. Then—bang!—out of the clear sky, she had broken the engagement. To Art Lawson, this fact had not made sense. He had been absolutely certain that Nina loved him, so certain of it that if he could only talk to her—

Well, he had talked to her!

"What did she say?" Cromwell questioned.

"She was very nice, very friendly. But she told me she didn't love me any longer."

"Ah?"

"That she loved the Prophet."

"Yes."

"And is going to marry him!"

Cromwell's indrawn breath made a sharp hissing sound. "And you, feeling she wasn't acting of her own free will, insisted that she come away with you."

"That's right. But—she wouldn't come. I—I tried to use force."

"And the deacons kicked hell out of you?"

"Right again," Lawson said.

"Ah." Cromwell nodded, then was silent. Lawson was silent. If Nina really loved the Prophet, he would not stand in her way. He wanted her to be happy. On the other hand, if the Prophet was using some kind of strange control over her and was forcing her to act against her own free will, then he was vitally interested in protecting her.

BUT HOW did he know she was acting against her own free will? He had faced her, talked to her. True, she had seemed a little strange, a little reserved, but this proved nothing. Any girl telling an ex-sweetheart that she no longer loves him acts reserved.

"What do you know about this business?" Lawson questioned Cromwell.

Gray Hat looked closely at him as if estimating how much of a shock the big man could stand. "I know several things," he said. "Some of them may jolt you."

"Go ahead. I can take it."

Cromwell shook his head as if he doubted this. "Your girl said she was

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going to marry the Prophet. One thing I know is this—the Prophet has at least nine wives already. I'm not certain he doesn't have twice this many, scattered around in other paradises, but I know of at least nine."

"What?" Lawson gasped. The words jolted him more than he had ever been jolted in his life. He seized Cromwell by the shoulders and began to shake the little man. "Damn you, do you realize what you are saying?"

Cromwell made no effort to resist the shaking. "I know very well what I'm saying," he answered, with dignity.

"You're a liar!" Lawson said, his voice hot. "Do you mean to tell me that Nina would consent to become the tenth wife of any man? You're lying like a dog!"

"Am I?" Cromwell questioned.

"You are!" Lawson answered.

"She told you she was going to marry the Prophet, didn't she?"

"I admit she told me that, but—"

"Well, I'm telling you he has at least nine other wives, but I'm not saying a word against your girl."

Lawson abruptly took his hands off of the little man's shoulder. The quiet assurance in the little man's voice had penetrated through even his hot anger. "You mean she doesn't know he has these other wives?" he questioned.

"No. Probably she knows, or guesses about them."

"Then what do you mean. If he has nine wives, he's a bigger bigamist than Bluebeard. If you can prove he has nine wives, you can put him in jail and throw away the key."

"I didn't say he was legally married to nine women. So far as I know, he is not legally married to one of them. He has at least nine women who consider themselves his wives. And I also say that each of these women know all about the others."

"But—the law—" Lawson faltered.

"I think, if you investigate, you will find that the Prophet is well within the law. He has not legally married one of these women. The law can't touch him for bigamy. Not only that, but none of the wives complain."

"But surely, if the wives know about each other, one will become jealous and file a complaint against him."

Cromwell laughed grimly. "Did you ever hear of one of the Prophet's followers filing a complaint against him?"

"No," Lawson admitted.

"And you never will," Cromwell spoke. "You and I may know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Prophet is a criminal but the laws of our civilization were never designed to catch a man like him. The basis and foundation of our law is the filing of a complaint, the making of charges, by someone who has been injured. These charges may be filed by the district attorney if he has reason to believe the law is being violated, for action by a grand jury, but even the district attorney can't act effectively unless he has adequate information on which to base his charges. In the case of the Prophet, such information could come only from his followers. And his followers never complain and never talk. They believe the Prophet is the greatest man alive on earth, they believe he can do no wrong, they believe that he is a saint and that no matter what he does, his action is right. In the face of such belief, you will find the laws written into our statute books are powerless."

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CROMWELL spoke with quiet sincerity. He spoke like an educated man, like a man who knows what he is saying. His words gave Art Lawson his first real glimpse into the monstrous organization that had grown up around him, spreading its tentacles into every walk of life, without his knowledge.

Art Lawson was a business man and a good citizen. He owned a small commercial package delivery concern consisting of twelve light trucks and six motorcycles. He had started business with one light truck, which he drove himself, and had built it up to where it was a profitable enterprise. He still worked like a fool to keep everything running right, with the result that he didn't have time to learn what was happening in the world around him.

Things like the Prophet were happening. Until now, the Prophet had been just another crank running an organization that appealed to nuts. Thinking the Prophet was no concern of his, he had paid no attention. The blindfolds were suddenly removed from his eyes and he saw how vicious an organization had grown up around here in his own home town.

At the same time, he realized that something extraordinary was involved.

He knew, vaguely, that the town was full of little sectarian groups. They had sprung up like mushrooms following the war and the vast uncertainity resulting from the global conflict. Mostly they were harmless little organizations, ranging in size from ten to a hundred people.

The Prophet had thousands of followers behind him, followers who were under an iron discipline.

How did the Prophet manage to control so many people so effectively? How did he enforce his iron discipline?

Who was the Prophet? What was he?

Art Lawson was suddenly shivering. He looked at Cromwell. "What can I do?" His uneasy gaze went down the street to the neon sign glaring in the sky.

Seek PEACE with the PROPHET.

"This thing has to be stopped," Art Lawson continued. He did not realize he was whispering now where formerly he had spoken aloud.

"Do you want to help stop it?" Cromwell asked. "Are you personally willing to help stop it? Have you realized that the Prophet is not a snake for someone else to step on but is your own individual, personal responsibility?"

Lawson stared at the little man. "I see what you mean. Up until now, the Prophet was something that didn't concern me personally, he was something far-off, something that the law ought to take care of. But now I see where it's my job to help. Yes. I want to help stop the Prophet."

"Then come with me," Cromwell said. "I want you to meet some people who have the same idea we have."

THEY ENTERED the back room of a jewelry repair shop on 63rd street, less than a dozen blocks from the Prophet's major paradise. It was close to midnight and the shops and stores on this busy little thoroughfare under the elevated tracks were closed. Only the taverns remained open. The sound of juke boxes mingled with the clatter of elevated trains and street cars to produce cacophonies of sound that go with every modern city.

Before he entered the jewelry shop, Cromwell scanned the street.

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Then he ducked down a passage between two buildings, quickly opened a door, and motioned for Lawson to precede him. They were in a back room where only a single light was burning but Cromwell moved across the room to a door. His knuckles went rap, rap—rap, on the barrier.

There was a sound of movement beyond the door. A square panel opened and a face looked out. The man at the peephole recognized Cromwell then turned questioning eyes on Art Lawson.

"It's all right," Cromwell said. "He's with me."

The whole business reminded Lawson of the operation of a speakeasy during prohibition. Why the eleborate safeguards and precautions? What were these men afraid of?

There were five men in the back room. They nodded to Cromwell and looked questioningly at Art Lawson

"This is Art Lawson," Cromwell said. "Art, this is Sam Pierce."

Lawson shook hands with a tall, gray-haired man.

"Art, meet John Raleigh."

There was sadness on Raleigh's face.

"This is Richard Wilson."

Lawson shook hands with the third man. A diminutive little Irishman by the name of Terry O'Leary was the fourth. The fifth was a slow-speaking giant Scandinavian—Bob Olaf.

"You are probably wondering what this is all about," Cromwell said, when the introductions were finished. "I'll tell you. Our purpose is to destroy the man who calls himself the Prophet."

He paused. Lawson let his eyes run around the group. He was a little surprised. It was not every day that you meet a group of men who plainly announce that their intention is to destroy another man. Looking at these men, he wondered if they really meant what Cromwell had said. The grimness on their faces told him that they did mean it.

What the law was powerless to do, these men proposed to do!

"And I'll tell you why," Cromwell continued. He looked at the tall, gray-haired man sitting quietly in a chair, at Pierce.

"The Prophet took my wife," Pierce said. The bitterness on his face was too deep for words.

"The same way he took your fiancee," Cromwell added, looking at Lawson.

"It was against her will," Pierce continued. "She attended one of his meetings. She was merely curious. She didn't intend to leave me for him. But he bewitched her and she joined his organization."

Pierce's face set in hard, grim lines.

"What happened then?" Cromwell prodded softly.

"I don't know what happened," Pierce said. "All I know is that she left me. A month later, she was found floating in Lake Michigan."

"Do you think she was murdered?" Lawson questioned.

"I don't know," Pierce answered. "All I know is that she is dead." He took a long-bladed pocketknife from his pocket, opened it, tested the edge against his thumb.

"And you?" Lawson spoke to the second member of the group.

"My son," Raleigh answered.

"Dead?"

"Oh, no," Raleigh replied. "He's alive—working body and soul for the Prophet. I saw him about a week ago. He was looking fine but he didn't even recognize me, his own father."

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"I see," Lawson said.

CROMWELL spoke to the other three men. When he had finished, Lawson had a complete picture of the force motivating these men. Each had lost a member of his immediate family to the Prophet.

He saw why they were trying to destroy the leader of this vast cult.

Revenge!

Only it was more than revenge. Revenge could not return Pierce's wife to him. Revenge would not return the loved one to them. But revenge would prevent members of other families from going to the Prophet. These men were not interested alone in revenge. They were also protecting society.

Protecting society from what? That was the question. Who was the Prophet? Who was the man who had turned a thirty-story apartment house into his own version of paradise?

Who was this Prophet who could take one man's wife, another man's fiancee, and still another man's son, and bind them to him with chains stronger than love? Who was this man who could break up families and destroy homes, striking at the very roots of society itself?

Cromwell opened a small safe in the wall, took from it a leather-bound, loose-leaf notebook.

"Like you, we have wanted to know everything possible about the Prophet. If we are to oppose him successfully, we have to know all we can find out about him."

He tapped the notebook with his finger. "All the information we have been able to gather is here. Read this and you will know as much as we know about him."

He looker piercingly at Lawson. "I need not mention that this is confidential information."

"I understand," Lawson said. He took the book.

They gave him an easy chair in the corner of the room, then left him alone while he read. As he began to study the typed pages, he could hear the low tone of their conversation.

The information contained in the notebook had been carefully summarized under various explanatory headings. The first heading was NAMES OF THE PROPHET

Richard Wotten is the real name of the man who calls himself the Prophet. He was born in 1901 at 1720 Buerger Street, Chicago. His parents separated when he was less than a year old and he was placed in the Vashon Orphanage. He was graduated from the Twelfth Street Grade School in 1915 and from McKinley Technical High School in 1919. His grades at the latter school were the highest ever made by any student and he was regarded there as a genius. At this point, he drops from sight for several years but it seems extremely likely that he is the Richard Wotten who was convicted of Forgery in 1923 and was sentenced and served two years in Joliet Penitentiary, being released in 1925. At this point Richard Wotten drops from sight for five years. He has stated he was travelling in the Orient during this period, that he visited China, India, Ceylon, and Asia Minor, learning the secrets of the esoteric sects of these areas.

The truth of this claim is not verified. It is known, however, that he worked as a seaman during part of this five-year period, in at least one instance jumping ship in Bombay.

In 1931 he established himself as a fortune teller on the Near North Side, marking his return to Chicago. In 1932 he was charged with extor-

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tion but the case was dismissed for lack of prosecution.

In 1933 he was again in trouble with the law, this time on a charge of blackmail. The case nolle prossed by the prosecuting attorney's office.

In 1934 he organized what he called the School of Esoteric Thought, promising to teach converts how they might prolong life for hundreds of years. On complaint of one of his disciples, the school was closed by postal authorities but no charges were brought against Wotten.

AGAIN WOTTEN drops from sight. Nothing more is heard of him until 1939. He was not in trouble with the law during this period. It is not known whether he was in Chicago during this time but rumors suggest he may have been operating as an astrologer, fortune teller, and magician, in and around Los Angeles.

In October of 1939, Richard Wotten again returned to Chicago—as the Prophet.

Making only one promise, "Come with me and I will give you peace," he began seeking followers.

The growth of his organization was slow at first, only a few men and women joining him. But if the growth was slow, it was steady. During the war years, when the minds of everyone were on the conflict in Europe and Asia, he built up his organization. He saw no military service. Working quietly and silently, by the time the war ended he had thousands of converts in his group. His early experiences with the police had taught him how to keep within the letter of the law.

Within his group, his word is law. Although this fact is not clearly recognized or admitted, he is unquestionably the most powerful man in Chicago today. And the most dangerous.

Convicted forger, suspected blackmailer, charlatan, crook, and fortune teller, this is part of the history of Richard Wotten.

But, Art Lawson saw, the history of the Prophet was incomplete. The source of his power over the people was left unexplained. How did he gain his followers? How did he bind them to him so that they never deserted?

Lawson saw the next heading in the notebook.

THE SECRET POWER OF THE PROPHET

Lawson began to read.

The power by which the Prophet, or Richard Wotten, binds his followers to him is a mystery. Although many great leaders have had the ability to inspire fanatacism in their followers, there is nothing in the history of Richard Wotten to indicate that he is a great leader or that he can inspire such fantacism in the men and women who acknowledge him their leader. But the fact remains that he *does* inspire such fanatacism. Their reverence for him is greater than their reverance for Almighty God. They regard his lightest word as the deepest revelation of divine mystery. He takes all their earnings from them; on joining him they donate every penny they possess and deed over to him all property and securities they possess. In return, he gives them nothing but food and shelter. In spite of this, they stick to him, swear by him, and it is suspected are willing to die for him.

What is the source of this power?

THUS THE summary of the history of Richard Wotten ended. Lawson read it and looked up from the notebook. Cromwell's eyes were on him.

"Well, you've read it. What do you

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think about it?" Cromwell said.

Lawson shook his head. "This is the most amazing thing I have ever read," he answered. "Don't you know *anything* at all about the method he uses to control his followers?"

"Not a thing." Cromwell answered.

"What about drugs?" Lawson ventured. "Perhaps he gives them some new kind of drug that science knows nothing about? Would a drug explain his control over them?"

"It might," Cromwell answered. We have thought of drugs. We have even made a careful study of all known narcotics but we could find no drug that would explain his control over his followers."

"Maybe they're hypnotized," Lawson ventured.

Again Cromwell shook his head. "They're hypnotized all right—people with such fanatical beliefs are always hypnotized—but it is no form of hypnosis known to medical science. We have consulted the best in the field, world-famous psychiatrists, and they are unanimous in answering that ordinary hypnosis will not explain the control of the Prophet. If he is using hypnosis, it is no form of hypnosis known to the doctors."

"You fellows have certainly done a lot of detective work," he said.

"That we have," Cromwell admitted. "And it has gotten us nowhere. Oh we have uncovered the history of Richard Wotten—probably we are the only people in Chicago who know his real name—we know who he is and how many times he has been in jail, but the real secret of the man has completely eluded us. And before we can act effectively against him, we have to know his secret. He has a secret, somewhere, if only we can find it."

"I think I know how you can discover it," Lawson said.

On the faces of the men watching him, eagerness instantly showed.

"How?" Cromwell asked.

"By sending someone to join his group, a spy to report back to you. Or go yourself, if you aren't known to the Prophet."

Cromwell smiled sadly. "We thought of that too," he said.

"You did? You sent someone?"

"We sent three men, at different times."

"What happened to them?"

"Nothing hapened to them." Cromwell spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "We sent them to join the Prophet. They did. Then they forgot all about us."

"What?" Startled incredulity was in Lawson's voice.

Cromwell nodded. "Our spies went over to the enemy," he said. "After the first three deserted us, we didn't send any more. All we were doing was furnishing Wotten with new recruits."

"The devil!" Lawson gasped. "Were these men reliable? Could you trust them?"

"We *thought* they were reliable, we *thought* they could be trusted."

"Why did they join the Prophet, if they were reliable?"

"Cromwell sighed. "If we could answer that question, we might be able to stop Wotten. We don't know why they joined the Prophet. He did something to them, the same thing he does to all his followers, the thing that binds them to him. "What is that thing? We don't know."

They were back again at their starting point—the source of the Prophet's power. In the back of Art Lawson's mind was the knowledge that over there in that tall apartment building, Nina Farrel was sleeping, his Nina, his no longer, in the clutch of that weird power they could not

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understand. The thought spurred him.

"Then I have only one other suggestion to make," he said.

"What is that?"

"Catch one of the Prophet's followers and find out from him what has happened to him, find out why he obeys Wotten so completely, why he believes so strongly in the man."

New interest appeared in Cromwell's alert eyes. "We hadn't thought of that," he said slowly. "It would be kidnapping, of course, but—" His eyes went around the group seeking approval.

"What the hell difference does it make if it is kidnapping?" Pierce growled. "Lawson may have something there. We may be able to discover something—"

In low voices they discussed the matter, considering the pros and cons. They didn't much like the idea of kidnapping, but in the face of the growing power of the Prophet, kidnapping had to be accepted. They accepted it.

"And I can suggest the man to kidnap." Lawson said, "The counterman in the hamburger joint. I'll go with you."

AN HOUR later, when the pimply-faced youth went off duty at the all-night hamburger joint and started away from it, he walked into the arms of four men. Before he knew what was happening, he was tied up, gagged, blindfolded, and in the back seat of a car.

In the back room of the jewelry shop, they removed the ropes, the gag, and the blindfold. The youth tried to glower at the grim-faced men surrounding him but the aggressive look faded under their hard stares.

"We're not going to hurt you," Lawson said gently. "We just want to ask you some questions. Have a cigarette." He proferred a pack to the youth.

"I don't smoke," came the answer. "What do you want with me? You'll get into trouble about this."

"Why did you join up with the Prohet?" Lawson questioned.

"Is that some of your business, maybe?"

"Yes," Lawson answered. "I'm thinking of joining myself. We're all thinking of joining."

"Then why don't you go and join?" Pimple Face demanded. "It ain't hard. All you've got to do is walk in one of his paradises and say you want to join."

"Because we're afraid to join," Lawson explained.

"Afraid?" Pimple Face swelled. "What's there to be afraid of? He won't hurt you. He'll be the best friend you ever had."

"That's what we wanted to know," Lawson spoke quickly. He was making this up as he went along, picking up cues from the youth. "We were afraid he would hurt us. He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"I'll say he didn't! Anybody who hurts me is going to get into trouble."

"What did you do when you joined?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Not a thing. One of the guys I knew had joined and they did all right by him, so I went over and told them I wanted to join too. They initiated me right away."

"Oh. You have to be initiated. I didn't know about that?"

"Sure. Everybody has to be initiated."

"What did they do to you when they initiated you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" Lawson's voice reflect-

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ed doubt. "Didn't they put you through some kind of a ceremony?"

"No. All you have to do is spend seven days in one room. But they feed you good while you're there."

"What happened while you were in this room?"

"Nothing happened. I just stayed there."

"They didn't even come in and talk to you?"

"No. They brought me things to eat and that was all. I didn't speak to a single person. That not speaking to anyone is the big part of the initiation."

Lawson hid his bewilderment. The initiation into the order of the Prophet consisted of being alone in a small room for seven days. That was all there was to it. This was how the Prophet's fanatics were made! It didn't sound incredible.

"Cut out the lying!" Lawson said savagely. "Or I'll knock your block off."

IT WAS a threat he had no intention of carrying out but Pimple Face didn't know that. To the youth, Lawson looked both big and mean. Pimple Face cringed away. "I didn't know anything," he whined.

"Nothing except lie like a dog."

"No, mister. Honest. I'm telling the truth. I swear it." Pimple Face's voice and the expression on his face revealed that he *was* telling the truth. Lawson groaned. He looked around the group for guidance. They watched him in silence but said nothing.

"What was in the room where you stayed while you were being initiated?" he probed. Somewhere there must be an answer, if he could only find it.

"What—what was in it?" Pimple Face didn't understand what was meant.

"Yes. How was it furnished?"

"Oh. Just a bed and a soft chair."

"Nothing else?"

"Not a thing, mister, except a wash basin."

Lawson, who had half-way been expecting to learn of the existence of some kind of intricate machinery in this room, groaned again. Another good idea had gone out the window. "What did you do while you were in there?"

"Slept, most of the time."

"Day and night?"

"I guess so. I know they had to wake me up several times, for meals. Slept, ate, and dreamed, that's about all."

"Dreamed?"

"Uh-huh. The dreams were the nicest part of the initiation. They were all about the Prophet—"

While the initiates were sleeping—and since they slept day and night they must have been drugged in some way—they dreamed about the Prophet! Here, at last, was something! What it was, Lawson didn't know, but something. Lawson felt the sudden pulse of excitement in his voice. He sensed a sudden eagerness in the listening men. They too, seemed to have caught some significance in the constant sleep and the dreams of the initiates.

"What did you dream about the Prophet?" Lawson questioned.

The face of the youth twisted into a frown. "I can't remember the dreams exactly," he said.

"Try to remember them," Lawson urged. "They were about the Prophet you said. What did you dream about him?"

The frown deepened. "Mostly what a fine man he is and what a great

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leader. And how it is a privilege to follow him. There were a lot of other things in the dreams too, but I can't remember them."

"Before the initiation you just *thought* the Prophet was a great man?" Lawson questioned.

Pimple Face nodded.

"And after the initiation?"

"I *knew* he was!" Pinple Face answered firmly.

Lawson looked at the men around him. "Gentlemen" he said. "We've got something. I don't know what it is, but we're on the trail of something—"

He stopped. Cromwell was no longer listening to him. The alert eyes of the little man were staring over his shoulder in sudden apprehension. Cromwell seemed to be listening.

Lawson whirled.

The back door was opening.

Two deacons were already in the room.

Others were following them.

FOR A LITTLE man, Cromwell moved with astonishing speed and hit with amazing strength. He was across the room and had hit the foremost black-clad figure a resounding blow on the chin before the deacon even knew what was happening. After he was hit, the deacon didn't have any chance to discover what was going on. He went out like an exploding light bulb.

Pierce and O'Leary were right behind Cromwell. Lumbering along behind them, fists the size of hams, was the giant Norwegian, Bob Olaf.

Like water out of a fire hydrant, black-clad deacons were boiling through the back door.

Cromwell struck at the second one. The blow missed and the third deacon hit the little man a savage lick.

Pierce and O'Leary waded into the fight. Two deacons closed with them and they wrestled together, each trying to trip the other. Bob Olaf reached across the shoulders of the wrestlers and shoved a ham-sized fist into the face of another deacon. Blood spurted from a broken nose. The deacon went backward.

Raleigh and Wilson grabbed chairs and waded in.

Crash! Wilson brought a chair down across the head of a deacon who was trying to get behind O'Leary.

Wilson in turn went down as a black-jack clipped him behind the ear.

Art Lawson swung on the deacon who had slugged Wilson. His fist went home at the base of the ear. A glazed look appeared in the eyes of this particular follower of the Prophet.

Lawson hadn't the faintest idea of how many deacons had tracked them here but Cromwell and his friends were Lawson's friends now. He fought with them.

He could see Bob Olaf grunting savagely as he swung giant fists. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Raleigh swing his chair. Wilson, on the floor, was trying to get to his feet.

Something that felt like a wildcat came out of nowhere and landed on Lawson's shoulders. Going down to his knees, he flung the wild cat over his shoulders, saw that the wildcat was actually Pimple Face. The counter man had picked his side and had gotten into the fight too.

Pimple Face looked as if he wished he hadn't gotten into it when Lawson threw him over his shoulders and he landed on the floor with a thump that rattled the building.

Lawson got to his feet.

Deacons were still trying to get through the back door. There were

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seven or eight in the room already and more were trying to get in all the time.

Lawson knew that this fight could have only one end.

It reached that end quicker than he had anticipated and in a way he had not expected.

He found himself looking into the muzzle of a gun.

Behind that gun a black-clad deacon with a sweaty face and flinty eyes was saying: "Get your damned hands up or I'll blow your guts out!"

Raising his hands, Lawson recognized this deacon as one of the gang that had beaten hell out of him in the alley. Around him, Cromwell and his friends were raising their hands. "What the hell do you want?" Lawson demanded.

"You'll find out soon enough. Keep those hands up. Line up against the wall, all of you."

Under the pressure of the guns, they obeyed. The deacons swiftly searched the room. They found the loose-leaf notebook that Lawson had been reading.

"This is it," One of them said. "This is one of the things we want."

Lawson wondered what else they wanted. He soon found out.

They wanted Cromwell, they wanted Pierce, they wanted Raleigh, Wilson, O'Leary, and Olaf.

They also wanted Arthur Lawson.

Ordered to turn and face the wall, the seven men were swiftly searched. Their hands were tied behind them and, blinded and gagged, they were led out of the back door and into the alley, where they were bundled into the back seats of two big cars that were parked there.

Blindfolded, Lawson tried to keep track of the turns they made as they drove away, so he would have some general idea of where they were being taken. He soon discovered he didn't have to bother. The deacons didn't take him far before the cars were stopped. They made him and the others get out of the cars, then marched them into a small room. A latch clicked. A motor hummed, Lawson's legs stiffened and he knew where he was.

In an elevator in the thirty-story apartment house that was the Prophet's major paradise.

WHEN THEY were untied and their blindfolds were removed, they found themselves in a large unfurnished room. The windows had been boarded up with planks two inches thick. The single door was solidly constructed and was fitted with a lock that looked adequate.

Five black-clad deacons were in the room with them. The deacon with the sweaty face and the flinty eyes looked them over. "I don't want to hear a word out of any of you," the deacon said. "Just keep quiet. And don't start anything." He nodded toward the .45 caliber automatic pistol he held in his hand.

"What do you want with us?" Lawson questioned.

Smack! The barrel of the pistol smashed against the side of his face. Stars exploded in front of his eyes. The blow didn't knock him out—it hadn't been intended to do that—but it jarred him all the way down to the soles of his feet.

"Damn you!" he gritted.

"I said not to talk," the deacon said, raising the pistol again.

"Easy," Cromwell whispered to Lawson. "Fighting will get us nothing now."

The flinty eyes of the deacon watched Lawson. "If you want some of this shooter, all you have to do is ask," the deacon stated.

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Lawson was silent. Hot anger burned like a consuming flame inside of him but he kept it under control.

"All you have to do is wait," the deacon said.

They didn't have to wait long. The door opened. Lawson didn't need the sight of the suddenly bowing deacons to tell him the name of the man who entered. The assured, swaggering bearing of the man, the long purple cape worn over the expensive clothes, the big diamond sparkling in the ring on the left hand, the haughty, arrogant face, all these things told him instantly who this man was.

The Prophet!

Richard Wotten.

The Prophet looked the prisoners over and turned to the deacon with the flinty eyes and the sweaty face.

"Well done, Deacon Rau," he said. "An excellent job."

Rau beamed at the praise.

"You have all the group?" the Prophet questioned.

"All of them and one more," Rau answered. He pointed to Lawson. "I don't know whether this one belongs or not, but he was with them when we took them and he was also in here early tonight causing a disturbance—"

"A disturbance?" The Prophet's arrogant eyebrows lifted as he looked at Lawson.

"He wanted to see one of our recent converts, Your Eminence. When we let him see her, he tried to take her away by force and we had to—ah, chastise him. I did not think it was important enough to justify disturbing Your Eminence."

"I see," the Prophet said. "What was the name of this convert he tried to kidnap?"

"Her name was Nina Farrel, before she joined our order."

"Nina Farrel?" The Prophet mused over the name, trying to place it in his mind., "Oh, yes, I recall her. Isn't she to be—" He grinned.

"Yes, Your Eminence," Rau answered with a leering grin. "She is to be one of your queens."

"And this felon tried to kidnap her?" The Prophet's eyes glittered at Lawson.

"That is what he tried to do, Your Eminence. Of course, we prevented it."

"Very good, Deacon Rau. I see I made a wise selection when I made you one of my trusted sub-leaders."

Rau bowed almost to the floor. "Thank you, Your Eminence."

Lawson gritted his teeth to keep from speaking.

THE PROPHET looked the group over again. He seemed well satisfied with what he saw. "We have been watching you people ever since one of your members joined our order with the thought of spying on us—and subsequently made a full confession of his guilt. My first impression was that you were not dangerous. However, you could make trouble, which I wish to avoid. So I decided to have you brought in and to dispose of you."

He paused. All the arrogance of Richard Wotten was on his face now. He was the master speaking to rebellious subjects; he was the lord talking to his slaves.

There was silence in the big room. Lawson could hear Cromwell breathing heavily. Pierce's face looked like a skull. Raleigh was clenching and unclenching his hands. Only Olaf remained calm.

"Yes, I have decided what I am going to do with you," the Prophet repeated.

The door opened again. Deacons began filing silently into the room. Lawson caught a glimpse of a blackjack one was carrying and knew why

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they were entering. He shivered.

The Prophet nodded. "You will like my decision, I am sure." Again came the arrogant nod.

He was needling them, torturing them. They were completely in his power and he was taunting them.

"Damn you!" Pierce grated. "What ever it is you are going to do with us, do it and shut up."

The Prophet laughed. He was enjoying this moment. "I am going to let you join our order," he said. "I am going to let you become Sons of the Prophet." The tone of his voice indicated he was conferring the equivalent of immortality on them.

"Damn you!" Pierce grated through bloodless lips. "You'll never do it to me." Hands groping ahead of him, he stumbled across the room toward the Prophet.

Deacon Rau stepped in front of him. Using the butt of his hand, he shoved Pierce backward. Pierce stumbled, then came forward again.

"Stand back!" Rau ordered.

Pierce kept coming. He moved like a man in a trance. His eyes focused on the purple robes of the Prophet, he didn't seem to see Rau at all.

"Back!" Rau ordered. He shoved Pierce again.

Pierce grabbed Rau's hand and pulled. Momentarily Rau was pulled off balance. Pierce shot forward. His clutching fingers reached for the throat of the Prophet.

Lawson started forward. One of the black-clad deacons was ahead of him. Pierce was trying to wrestle with the Prophet. Wotten easily held him off. There was no real strength in Pierce, and a child could have handled him. His getting past Rau had been a freak. It was obvious he had no strength but in spite of this the deacon that had stepped forward struck downward with the blackjack, a cruel, heavy blow.

The blackjack hit. There was a splintering sound. Pierce, his skull crumpled like an eggshell, crumpled to the floor.

In the big room stunned silence fell. Even the Prophet looked surprised. Some of his arrogance deserted him in the face of the simple fact of death.

Cromwell spoke slowly, saying, "That was murder."

The Prophet glanced quickly at him. "Murder!" Cromwell repeated.

THE DEACON who had struck the blow lifted his gaze from the body on the floor to Cromwell. "He—he was trying to hit His Eminence," he said, as if this explained and justified his action.

"So what?" Cromwell snarled. "He had no strength. He couldn't have harmed a child. It was murder and we are witnesses."

For a moment, in the face of this charge, all of the Prophet's arrogance deserted him and he looked almost stunned. "This—it was an accident," he spurted.

"It was no accident," Cromwell repeated.

"It was murder all right," Raleigh spoke.

"Yah!" Olaf nodded. "Murder."

They scared the Prophet! For a moment. But not for longer. All his sang-froid reasserted itself, all his arrogance returned. He began to chuckle. "You fellows had me going," he said.

The deacons looked a little surprised at hearing this. In their opinion, nothing could worry the Prophet.

"I thought for a moment," the Prophet continued, "that I was going to have to have you eliminated. I forgot you are going to join us."

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Lawson suddenly remembered that no follower of the Prophet had ever betrayed him. If they joined his order they would never be witnesses against him. Cromwell had forgotten it too. He remembered it now. "I'll see you in hell before I join you!" he snapped, starting toward the Prophet

It was the gallant gesture of a brave man. Cromwell knew he didn't have a chance to win, but he tried.

The deacons bore him down. They swarmed over him. Still struggling, he was carried from the room.

The Prophet smiled thinly at the remaining men. "You're going to join me whether you like it or not. Your only choice is whether you go willingly or whether my deacons use force. It doesn't matter to me but you can take your choice."

Lawson shrugged. There was no point in giving the deacons another chance to beat hell out of him. It would be fun for them, it would be torture for him, and in the end it would gain him nothing. "I'll go willingly," he said.

As he marched from the room with a deacon holding on to each arm, he heard the Prophet order two of his men to pick up the body of Pierce. "Take him out into the lake and dump him," the Prophet said. "And put enough weight on him so he will never float."

The Prophet spoke like a man who had had experience in such matters and knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

They passed out of the barred room and into a long hall. A girl was walking toward them. She glanced at Art Lawson and did not recognize him.

She was Nina Farrel.

The two deacons prodded him into an elevator, took him down several floors, unlocked a door, and shoved him into a small, windowless room. A single dim light burned in a ceiling fixture. Its wan rays revealed two pieces of furniture in the room, a hospital bed and a chair.

Lawson stumbled across the room and fell face downward on the bed. He didn't much care what happened to him now. He had seen Nina Farrel and she hadn't even recognized him. After this, there didn't seem to be much reason why he should even stay alive.

He thought of Nina, Nina of the lithe legs, and firm body and the pert little face. His Nina! His no longer.

The room had apparently been thoroughly soundproofed. He couldn't hear even a whisper of noise. The silence of no-sound began to beat into his ears. Then he was aware of a far-off drone. Somewhere some kind of machine was in operation, some kind of electrical equipment, he judged by the sound.

The equipment wasn't functioning properly. The drone faltered and faded out, then came on again, then abruptly stopped.

"What are they doing to me?" he thought.

So far as he could tell, they weren't doing anything to him but he knew this wasn't correct. Even though he couldn't detect it, they were doing something to him. The converts of the Prophet spent seven days in one of these rooms and were never the same men again.

"They're doing something," he thought. He wondered what type of radiation was flowing through this silent place. What rays were beaming in here, filtering through his body, lancing into his mind, changing him, altering him, making him dif-

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ferent? He didn't know. He didn't even know that any type of radiation was coming into the room. It was only a fancy.

ART LAWSON did not know when he went to sleep or how long he slept but he awakened with a start.

Somebody was shaking his bed and muttering to himself.

Lawson sat up. A man had entered the room and was bending over and examining the legs of the bed.

"Ding-bust the ding-busted thing anyhow!" the man said. He stood up. A pair of pathetic brown eyes looked at Lawson and looked through him and did not actually see him.

The bee man from the hamburger joint!

"What are you doing here?" Lawson asked.

"It isn't working right," the bee man answered. "It's out of phase and the waves are cancelling each other instead of reinforcing."

"Eh?" Lawson said. This was gibberish. It was so many words that didn't mean anything to him. He had the uncomfortable feeling that the words meant something to the bee man but he couldn't penetrate that meaning.

"I came to fix it," the bee man explained. "That's my job, fixing it and keeping it running. I invented it so I get to fix it when anything goes wrong." There was pride in his voice.

"What are you talking about?" Lawson questioned.

"The hive frequency," the bee man answered.

"The *what*?"

"The frequency of the hive," the bee man explained. "The instinct of the hive and of the swarm, the wonderful power that holds the swarm together. Only it isn't an instinct. It's a frequency to which the bees are tuned by nature. The queen generates this frequency. That's the way she holds the hive together, that's the way she compels the workers to get her honey and the warriors to defend the hive, and the workers in the cells to take care of the young. They *can't* do anything else as long as she is generating this frequency. The frequency can be felt by bees for miles around the hive. That's the way they find their way back to the hive when they are out gathering honey. They pick up the radiations generated by the queen bee and follow them back to the hive just like an airplane flies a radio beam."

He was full of the subject. Somewhere, he had devoted his life to the study of bees and he had gone whacky on the subject. Or had he?

In the dim light, Lawson stared at the enigmatical little man. He felt a touch of chill. It grew stronger.

"I don't understand it," he said. "What does the hive frequency—whatever that is—have to do with your being here in this room?"

"It's not being generated properly," the bee man patiently explained. "The trouble is somewhere here in this room. The bed sits on metal plates on the floor. Connections are made from the generator to these metal plates. The frequency forms a concentrated fluz of radiation that flows through the person lying on the bed. Only it isn't doing this now."

The bee man frowned. "I thought perhaps the legs of the bed had slipped off the metal plates on the floor, but that isn't it. It's something else." He dropped to his knees and again looked under the bed, apparently examining the springs.

Lawson thought very fast, trying to decide how to handle this situation.

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There was something here so amazing that it staggered the mind.

"When I'm in bed, this hive frequency flows through me?" he said. forcing calmness into his voice. "Is that right?"

"That's right," the bee man's muffled voice came from under the bed.

"What does it do to me?" Lawson questioned.

"It tunes the atoms of your mind to itself," the bee man said.

"And what does that mean?"

"It means that the instinct of the hive dominates you. In a sense, it gives you the same kind of mind a bee has."

"Is—" Lawson forced the shakiness out of his voice. "Is this the way Wo—the Prophet controls his followers?"

THE BEE man stuck his head out from under the bed. He seemed surprised. "Of course it is," he said. His voice went on, musingly. "The Prophet is doing a wonderful work. He is taking the disorganized human race and making it over into the perfectly integrated society of the hive! This is a wonderful thing to do! Think what it will mean! No more quarrels, no fighting between individuals or between nations. Bees don't fight. No more time wasted playing silly games like baseball and tennis and golf. Do you know how much time men waste playing or watching silly games like these? Well, the answer is appalling. But all that wasted time will be stopped when the Prophet takes over completely. Bees don't play. Nor will humans play when the bee society is established. Isn't that wonderful?" He beamed at Lawson as if he was expecting fulsome praise.

Lawson started to speak and choked over his own words. Here was the secret Cromwell and his companions had sought in vain. Here was the explanation for the Prophet's control of his followers.

He made them into bees! Not their physical bodies, but the subtle parts of their minds were caught and held by the same fierce instinct that dominates every activity of the industrious little insects. Only it wasn't an instinct that controlled them. It was a frequency, a radiation, a force like radio waves, that flowed out from this so-called paradise and controlled the actions of the men and women who had become, without the possibility of their ever knowing it, the slaves of Richard Wotten!

Here was the secret!

"Did I understand you to say you discovered this frequency of the hive?" Lawson cautiously questioned.

"Yes," the bee man proudly answered. "I discovered the frequency and learned how to generate it artificially and how to apply it to humans. It had to be modified, you know, before it would work on humans."

"I imagine it did," Lawson answered. "But if you invented it, how did the Prophet get it?"

"Oh, I took it to him," the cracked little inventor replied. "I was living in Southern California at the same time and Mr. Wotten was there also. I took my discovery to him and he immediately saw the great value of it and the great work that could be done with it. At once, he began to make plans to bring the benefits of the hive to a great number of people. We decided to work in secret so that misguided persons could not oppose us until we were well established."

"I see," Lawson said. "I see." He kept the harshness out of his voice and restrained the impulse to wring the neck of this little man. For the bee man did not know what he had

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done and what he was doing. The bee man was as crazy as a loon. It was a harsh fate that had decreed that the one man who made a remarkable discovery about the hive frequency of the bees should also be wacky, but that was the way things stood. Breaking the neck of the bee man would not help matters any. On the contrary, the bee man would have to be used to correct the trouble he had caused. If this could be done! If!

And how?

"I suppose you were the first person to be initiated into the Prophet's following?" Lawson said.

"Oh, I was initiated," the bee man answered sadly. "But it didn't take on me. It doesn't take on some people. For some reason, I am immune to the frequency. It is too bad but for some reason I seem doomed to miss the ecstacy of those people who are able to respond to the hive frequency."

He sounded sad and forlorn. To his mind, it was a sorrowful thing that he, of all people, could not respond to his great discovery.

"Then you are not a slave of the Prophet?" Lawson questioned.

"A slave? No one is a slave. I follow him because I know it is the right thing to do. I am the first of his followers. He lets me take care of the electrical equipment that is used to generate the frequency."

"That's nice of him," Lawson said.

"Isn't it?" the bee man said. He dived again under the bed, seeking the cause of the malfunctioning of his beloved equipment. Lawson could hear him muttering to himself. Then he heard him say, "Ah, here's the trouble. A broken connection! Well, I can fix this in seconds."

A FEW MINUTES later, the bee man climbed out from under the bed. "Now everything is all right," he said. "You won't have to miss your initiation after all. Just lie still and let the radiation flow through you. You won't be able to feel it but you will have many strange and wonderful dreams, which will prove to you that everything is going all right."

Grinning happily, he moved to the door of the cell, unlocked it, and tiptoed out.

Somewhere a motor generator began to drone steadily. For a few moments, Lawson listened to that drone. Then he got quickly out of the bed and sat on the floor. He had some hard thinking to do.

A trap door in the lower panel of the door opened and a tray of food was placed inside the room. Breakfast for the neophyte! An orange, two slices of buttered toast, a small bowl of cereal, and a glass of water.

He was hungry but he left this food untouched. He could wait until the next meal.

Far-off, somewhere beyond this sound-proof room, the drone of the generator sounded steadily. Lawson did not in the least doubt that the hive frequency was flowing through this room.

He stayed away from the bed.

The frequency was concentrated there.

The followers of the Prophet spent a week in a cell like this. After that, they were never the same. Nina Farrel had spent seven days in a room like this, maybe in this very room. Now she was destined to be one of the queens of this monstrous hive.

In the bee hive, there was only one queen. Here there were many queens. And a king. The bees had no kings.

He had to think. Trying to escape would get him nothing. The hall outside was well guarded. He had to think. The bee man kept returning to his mind. The cracked little inventor

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was really responsible for Wotten's organization. Wotten, of course, thought the bee man was also under the influence of the frequency of the hive.

Was this a clue?

He tried to follow out this line of thought. It seemed to lead somewhere but he couldn't think where. The little man was crazy. What could you do with a crazy man. You couldn't predict what a nut would do, unless you went right along with his nuttiness. But in this case, he probably wouldn't even see the bee man again.

There was a way to see him. Lawson stared hard at the bed. He crawled under it and investigated the metal plates on which the legs rested.

He grinned. Yes, there was a way to get the little inventor back in here.

But he didn't know what to do with the bee man after he had gotten him into the room.

He had to think.

Hours passed. He was tired, he wanted to sleep. Eventually he dozed off. When he awakened the tray of untasted food had been removed from in front of his door and a new tray had taken its place. Lunch! Rice and milk and a glass of water. He took a sip of the water. It had a queer taste and he set it aside. He could wait.

The dinner tray arrived and still he hadn't thought of any plan. Again he refused to eat.

Hours later, an idea came to him. He thought it over, testing it from all angles. It was fantastic, it was crazy. An average person would laugh at him if he proposed this idea.

But he wasn't dealing with an average, normal person. He was dealing with a nut. Who could tell what a nut would fall for? Decision in his manner, he rose to his feet and gently shoved the bed off the metal floor plates. Then he laid down on it.

The drone of the generator faltered, went into silence as it was automatically shut off.

A few minutes later the door of the cell opened and the bee man came muttering into the room.

"I think I accidentally moved the bed," Lawson said, contritely. "I'm sorry if I did anything wrong."

"Oh, no trouble at all, no trouble at all," the bee man said.

"I'll help you fix it," Lawson said. "Then we'll talk a while. I want you to tell me all about the bees.

"I'll be glad to do that!" the gratified bee man exclaimed.

Lawson chose his words with care. He was talking for his life, and he knew it, and the lives of a lot of other people as well.

IN THE DARK hours before the dawn the neon sign on top of the tall apartment house flickered and went on. The people who lived in this tall building did not know the sign had gone out. They had no way of knowing. They didn't even know anything was wrong, at first.

This building had originally been designed to contain six, seven, and eight-room apartments. Favored followers of the Prophet still occupied such luxurious quarters but in other instances the apartments had been converted into barracks. Double and triple-decker beds had been built into the rooms. As many beds as the space would hold. The single men lived in these barracks, the workers, single worker women in others. Many of the large apartments had been partitioned off into single rooms which had been assigned to families who became followers of the Prophet. Wotten welcomed families, especially if they had children. Older people might under some circumstances be immune to the frequency of the hive, or might throw

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it off, but a child, initiated at a tender age and brought up under the direct influence of this compelling radiation, would never have a chance to recover from it.

This was paradise, this was the hive, of the Prophet. Of the King Bee.

In the dark hours before dawn something went wrong in Paradise.

The first untoward incident occured among the guards always maintained on the ground floor. Five deacons were on watch here. One of the deacons, who had been dozing in his chair, suddenly rose to his feet, looked around him, shook his head, and said, "To hell with this!" He walked out the front door.

The four other deacons stared at him in consternation. One ran after him.

"Hey! he yelled.

"Hey, what?" came the answer.

"You can't do this, you can't walk away?"

"Why the hell can't I?" the offending deacon snapped. He kept on walking. A puzzled expression on his face, the guard stared after him. "After all, why can't he walk off if he wants to?" the puzzled guard thought.

This was forbidden thought and he knew it. The fact that he could think such a thought surprised him. Up until now, he hadn't been able to think such thoughts. Up until now, he couldn't have let a fellow deacon desert. What had happened to him? He didn't know. He stared at his brother deacon walking away in the darkness.

"Hey!" he called again.

"What do you want?" the deserting deacon answered.

"Wait a minute. I'm leaving with you."

The two deacons stared up at the tall apartment building. Up until now, this place had been paradise to them. But something had happened. Something had happened inside their minds. They no longer thought of this place as paradise. They suddenly realized it wasn't paradise. Its real name was a much uglier, shorter word —hell. This was in their minds. They didn't want to be around hell. They trotted away into the darkness.

Three deacons were left on guard on the ground floor. They looked inquiringly at each other and at the departing two.

"That's damned funny!" one of them said. A startled expression appeared on his face.

"I swore!"he whispered. Only subleaders were allowed to swear in this organization. Profanity was strictly forbidden to ordinary deacons.

When the deacon swore, each of the three began to suspect that something was wrong but they didn't know what it was and they didn't seem to have the will to try to find out. As they looked at each other, they heard a scream outside, then a loud thump.

Running outside, they saw a woman lying on the sidewalk. They knew it was a woman because of the torn nightgown. The nightgown was the only thing that would identify her now.

She had jumped from a window on the twenty-eighth floor.

Hell was loose in paradise.

IN THE BARRACKS where the single men lived there was a stir and a mutter. It ran all through the rooms, through all the cubbyholes that had once been luxurious apartments before they had been converted into the cells of this vast hive. It was a stir of awakening, a mutter of beginning complaint A tired worker sat up on the top deck of a triple-decker bed.

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"Where the hell am I?" the worker said. "And what the hell am I doing here?"

Underneath him, the man lying awake stirred restlessly. "That's what I've been wondering," he said. "What the hell are we doing here?"

Climbing out of bed, they began to dress. Around them other men were awakening.

In the rooms that had been converted to the use of single women, a woman suddenly started screaming.

"Let me out of here!" she yelled. "I want out of here right now, right this minute."

Her screams awakened other women. They began to stir restlessly. New thoughts were in their minds. Rebellious thought.

* * *

Up, high up in the big building a shaking little man asked for the hundredth time. "Are you sure I'm doing the right thing? Are you sure about it?"

"I'm positive," Art Lawson answered reassuringly. "You're doing the only right thing there is to do."

"I'd hate to be wrong," the bee man said, dubiously.

"You're doing the rightest thing you ever did in your life," Lawson firmly said. "And the next right thing to do is to help me locate my five—four friends who were being initiated. Can you do that?"

"Oh, I can do it. But are you sure it's right to rescue them?"

"Positive of it," Lawson answered. "Come on and find them for me."

* * *

Finding them was no job. They were in cells identical to the one Lawson had occupied. The bee man led him to them and unlocked the doors. Cromwell looked shaken to the bottom of his soul, Raleigh, Wilson and O'Leary were trembling. Olaf's broad face was gray with sweat.

"There's something in my mind," Olaf repeated over and over again. "Something wrong in my head."

"It will be all right in a little while," Lawson told him.

"How did you get us out of here?" Cromwell questioned. "What happened? The deacons—"

"Have other things on their minds just now," Lawson answered. "Look at that."

Two of the black-clad deacons, assigned to watch the initiation cells, came tumbling from a room across the hall. They were fighting like scared, angry tom cats. Kicking, gouging, biting, clawing, they were trying to tear each other to pieces.

"Just their normal natures reasserting themselves," Lawson said, watching the fight with approval. "Come on. There are two more people in this bee hive that I want to find. One of them a girl, the other is the Prophet."

They left the two followers of the Prophet battling each other to death in the hall.

The elevators were not operating. They used the stairs. Lawson sniffed at the air rising up the stair shaft. "Smoke," he said.

Far-off they could hear the howl of an approaching siren.

THE HUGE building was full of sound. Somewhere down the stairs a woman was screaming and a man was swearing. Doors were banging. A gun cracked viciously once, then was silent. There was a bumping sound down below them. As they started up the stairs, a screaming woman clad only in a nightgown came running down. She was hotly pursued by a black-clad deacon.

It was Cromwell who tripped the deacon. He fell down a flight of stairs

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and hit the concrete with a thud, twitched once, then was still.

Lawson grunted in commendation.

The woman cowered close to them.

"Where are the quarters of the queens?" Lawson asked her.

She pointed upward.

"Lead us to them."

She didn't want to do it, she wanted to run.

"We won't hurt you," Lawson said. "You're safer with us than you would be anywhere else in this place. Take us to the rooms of the queens."

She led them up the stairs.

Off in the night the wail of the siren grew louder. A second was howling farther away. And smoke was flowing up the stairs.

"I know it," Lawson answered. "Well, it's stone and concrete and all that will burn will be the furnishings. He went on up the stairs. They followed him.

They came to the luxurious apartments occupied by the favorites of the Prophet.

There was confusion here too.

They went on up.

They came to the quarters of the queens. In one word, this section of this tall building was—a harem. Nothing more, nothing less. A harem. Wotten, utilizing the tremendous power that made men and women follow him blindly, had chosen to revive the harem of oriental despots for the gratification of his sensual pleasures.

There was only one woman in these luxurious rooms, a forlorn, frightened, bewildered girl.

She saw Art Lawson. And rushed to his arms.

She was Nina Farrel.

"Art, Art, what am I doing here? What happened to me?"

He petted her, soothed her, comforted her. He did not know that Cromwell and his companions were gone until he looked around.

"Where did they go?" he questioned.

This floor was directly under the roof. Above them was a roaring sound.

A stairway and an open door leading upward revealed where Cromwell had gone.

Lawson hastily followed him. He found Cromwell and the others on the roof.

A luxurious penthouse, the private palace of the Prophet, had been built here. And the Prophet was here.

He was trying to get out of the penthouse.

A dozen woman in nightclothes were struggling to get at him.

They were his ex-queens, the inmates of his harem.

They had realized what he had done to them.

They were trying to pay him off.

WOMEN scratched him, women grooved his hair with their fingernails, women tore out whole handfuls of his hair. One struck at him with a hammer, a second pounded at him with the heel of her shoe.

He struck back at them, hit at them with his fists, kicked them aside, ran from the penthouse.

Not until then did Lawson see where the Prophet was trying to go.

There was a helicopter on the roof. Wotten had landed the plane here and had kept it ready in case of emergency. The emergency had arrived. The door of the ship was open. The Prophet was running toward it.

Lawson started after him.

Two men passed him. One was a huge giant who moved with remarkable speed in spite of his size—Olaf the Norseman. The second was a tiny little man who moved like a darting

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insect. The bee man!

Wotten scrambled inside the helicopter. He tried to close the door and start the motor at the same time. The motor ground, coughed, sputtered, picked up. The big vanes began to revolve. This much the Prophet got done. But he didn't get the door closed.

Olaf and the bee man both got through the door before he could slam it in their faces.

They grabbed him as he sat at the controls.

He fought back at them.

The whirling vanes forced Lawson back. There was sudden death in those whizzing metal blades.

In the ship the Prophet shoved the throttle wide open The vanes moved faster. The copter rose an inch from the roof, quivered there in the air.

"Stop it!" Lawson screamed. "Turn the motor off."

The Prophet recognized the danger as well as Lawson but he could do nothing to avert it Olaf's giant hands were gripped around his throat. The bee man was scratching at his eyes. He was trying to shove them away from him.

Inches at a time, with the slow certainty of doom, the copter dragged itself across the roof. One wheel went off the edge.

The ship dipped down.

The whirling vanes tugged at it, lifted it, pulled it closer and closer to the edge.

Two wheels went over.

It dropped a foot. The whirling vanes struck the roof. They were smashed to smithereens by the impact.

Screaming metal exploded through the air.

The copter went off the roof. As it fell, it turned over and over.

An infinity of time passed while the people on the roof all held their breath. Then, from thirty stories down, there came a splintering crash.

THE NIGHT was hideous with the scream of sirens and the roar of laboring engines pumping tall streams of water into the burning building. Every piece of fire-fighting equipment in South Chicago had been called to this blaze. Behind the fire engines came the squad cars and the ambulances. Every ambulance from every hospital in the city was called. The receiving rooms of the hospitals were soon jammed to the roof with the dazed, bewildered followers of the Prophet.

The newspapers headed the story

REVOLT IN PARADISE

They told how the followers of the Prophet had for some unexplained reason suddenly revolted against him and how he had been killed while trying to escape in a private helicopter he had kept on the roof of the luxurious building he had owned and operated as a paradise for his followers. They told about the fire and how many people had been injured in the blaze. The printed pictures of firemen fighting the fire, of watching the throngs around the building, and of the wrecked helicopter. They ran amazed stories about the helicopter with the Prophet.

The newspaper reporters did not succeed in interviewing Arthur Lawson when he and his companions escaped from the burning building, carrying a dazed girl between them. He didn't feel called on to volunteer any information about what had actually happened, for obvious reasons. Only to Cromwell and his companions did

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he tell the real story, how the whole organization of the Prophet had been based on the life of a hive of bees and how the little bee man had made a tremendous discovery in the so-called hive frequency, by which the lives of the little insects were controlled.

They listened carefully to what he said. Probably they didn't understand all of it, he didn't understand it himself, but the general idea they understood. One thing they did not understand.

"But what happened to make the Prophet's followers revolt?" Cromwell questioned. "Last night they were his willing slaves. Then, bingo, they revolted. What caused the change?"

"I talked to the bee man into reversing the frequency that controlled them," Lawson answered. "There was a lot of electrical equipment in that building and it was generating the hive frequency, modified to match human minds. As long as that frequency was being generated properly, they were his slaves, but when it was reversed, it changed them into men and women who hated him."

"Oh," said Cromwell slowly. "I see. But how did you talk the bee man into reversing this frequency?"

"In order to understand, you must remember that he was crazy, nutty, about bees. He thought the hive was the most wonderful social organization on earth and that bees were the most intelligent form of life ever created. He worshipped bees. All I had to do to get him to reverse the frequency was to point out to him how Wotten had perverted and degraded the wonderful social system of the bees."

Perverted and degraded it?" Cromwell questioned.

"Yes. You see, the hive is ruled by a queen, a female. Wotten was a male and he had made himself into a king, something that the bees do not have. As soon as the bee man realized this, he was willing to cooperate with me in destroying the organization the Prophet had built up—because it was not built in accordance with the social order of the insects—it had a king instead of a queen."

His voice went into silence. The horror that had been in his mind was beginning to die away. He pressed the still trembling girl close to him.

Over near the lake front the clanging bell of a departing fire engine broke the silence of the new day.

FAIRYLAND OF WONDERS

★ By June Lurie ★

THE PHRASE "fairyland of wonders" actually applies to the whole United States for truly there is nothing in this world more remarkable than this country. The world of science has made every new invention available to everyone of us. If we want anything we can have it. This is true of anything, though it be an education or a gadget.

For example, if you wish for any modern invention you can have it with a surprisingly little amount of trouble. Thus, you say, "I'd like a car—or a plane—or a radio—or a television set—" or a host of any other gadgets which strike your fancy. Then you think, "but I don't have the money." But that's still all right. You can still have what you want.

Just flip through any one of the numerous popular mechanical and scientific magazines, ranging from *Radio News* to *Popular Science*. Within the pages of these magazines you can find ways and means of *building* or *making* exactly what you need, for very little money.

Modern industry has made things exceedingly cheap. The thing that makes them costly is the amount of labor that must be put into them. If you build something for yourself, the labor problem is eliminated

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—whether it's a home or a television set. Why don't more people do this?

That's a hard question to answer unless you say it's simply a matter of lazyness. As a concrete proposal, take the construction of a television set. Nowadays everyone says, "I'd like a TV set, but they're too expensive!" But they aren't. You can buy excellent ones in kit form for a fraction of the complete cost. Television is chosen as an example because it has caught the public fancy.

Any reader of science or science-fiction knows that things are always easier than they seem. If you were shown a schematic diagram of a TV set you'd shudder and shake your head— "that's too hard for me." But if you saw how these kits are broken down into easy, childishly-simple parts and circuits, you'd say, "why, *I* can do *that!*"

American manufacturers have provided in the form of kits for practically everything, simple groups of equipment which will enable a complete novice to assemble anything he chooses, be it a TV set or an automobile. Unfortunately too few people are aware of these wonderful opportunities to make things for themselves. In order to keep the kits low in price, high pressure sales tactics are not used.

It is more than a coincidence that the many readers of science fiction and fantasy constitute a high percentage of the people who have the initiative and industriousness to go out and make many of these things for themselves. In fact, many a scientist has gotten his initial interest in science from being started into awareness through the pages of *Amazing Stories*, or a similar magazine. S-f fans have that insight into a good thing when they see it.

So the next time you see kits for building anything, don't ignore them—you might do very well with them yourself!

* * *

STEAM REVIVAL

By LEE OWENS

WHO HASN'T heard of the venerable and patriarchal "Stanley Steamer?" This early automobile, powered by a steam engine is being given a lot of thought these days, with the ever sky-rocketing increase in price and scarcity of gasoline.

It is the belief of many persons in this country that most of our automobiles are gas engine driven and not steam powered, for one simple reason—the gas engine got the head start. But basically the steam engine is a better machine—at least for automotive vehicles. Today there are clubs and organizations whose members, usually skilled and amateur machinists, spend their time taking the gas engines out of autos and installing steam engines.

What are the advantages of steam engines? To begin with, mechanically they're much simpler. They cost very little to operate. They require no transmission or gear shifting. They wear very slightly. They're so good, it's a shame and a crime that they're not in general use.

A steam engine for a car is a small two cylinder device, operated in an oil bath. Since it is not exposed to high temperatures and high speeds, it wears very little and requires hardly any repairs. The other part of the engine, the steam boiler, is almost as simple. It is a "flash" type boiler, meaning an assembly of welded pipes which heat very rapidly. A modern steam "flash tube" boiler can provide steam in a matter of five or ten minutes. This is high pressure steam, just like in a big steam engine. The heating source is a childishly simple burner, much like the pot-type household oil burner. Any fuel may be used—oil, kerosene, gasoline—you name it.

The only maintainance required is the occasional cleaning of the burner. Electric ignition is provided for the burner. A conventional generator provides for lights, radio, etc.

We can say unequivocally, that the steam engine is infinitely better for automotive vehicles than the gas engine, but for some perverse reason, they are not manufactured on a grand scale. Mechanics here and there must build their own.

In Germany, steam trucks are very common—as in England. Steam buses are also used by these countries. Apparently the only thing that will drive us to make them, is a serious oil shortage.

It is our belief, that the steam turbine offers even greater possibilities. With the work that is being done on turbines in general, such a gadget should prove more economical than a gas turbine which has also been experimented with in England for automobiles.

Until an electric accumulator is invented so that electric motors may be used in cars, the steam engine is the best bet for future advances. It is the fondest desire of the writer to get a chance to operate one of these steam powered vehicles. Certainly, no ordinary gas car could hold a candle to it in regard to speed. Even the ancient Stanley Steamer could do close to a hundred miles per hour!

Give us back the steam age—at least in automobiles! We're sick of the noisy, inefficient, complex gasoline engine!

* * *

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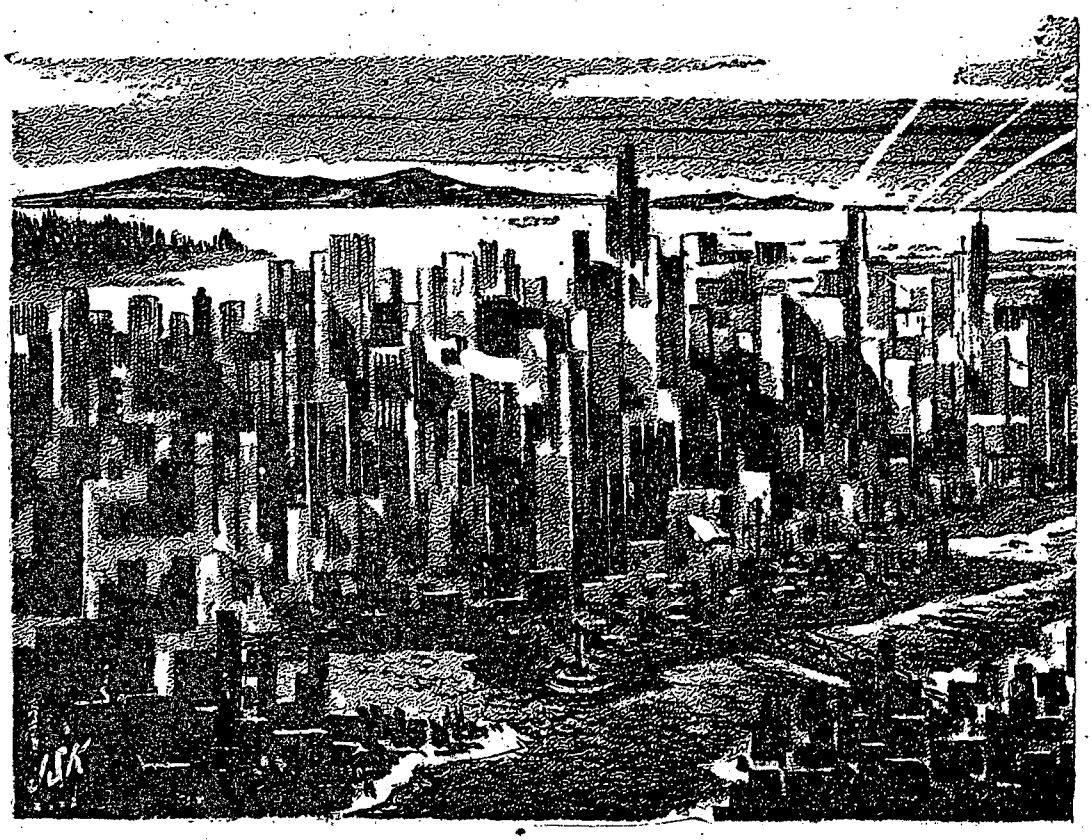
SEED of EMPIRE

By GUY ARCHETTE

War had flattened the land, leaving dead cities as grim tombs — and all because one man envisioned an empire — of corpses!

AT AN ALTITUDE of 40,000 feet and at a speed approaching 600 miles per hour, the Illinois Royal Air Force buzzed along, a vast formation of some 400 single-seater rocket fighting craft. Northeast they were headed, the morning sun glinting off their stubby wings and tapering hulls, vapor trails marking their swift passage through the clear blue sky.

Captain Jon Jones, leading the right wing of Squadron Two, pressed his forehead against the plastic surface of his observation blister, peering ahead and down. Excitement bubbled through his veins at prospect of the fight which lay ahead, though it was temporarily forgotten now as he sought to satisfy a fleeting curiosity.



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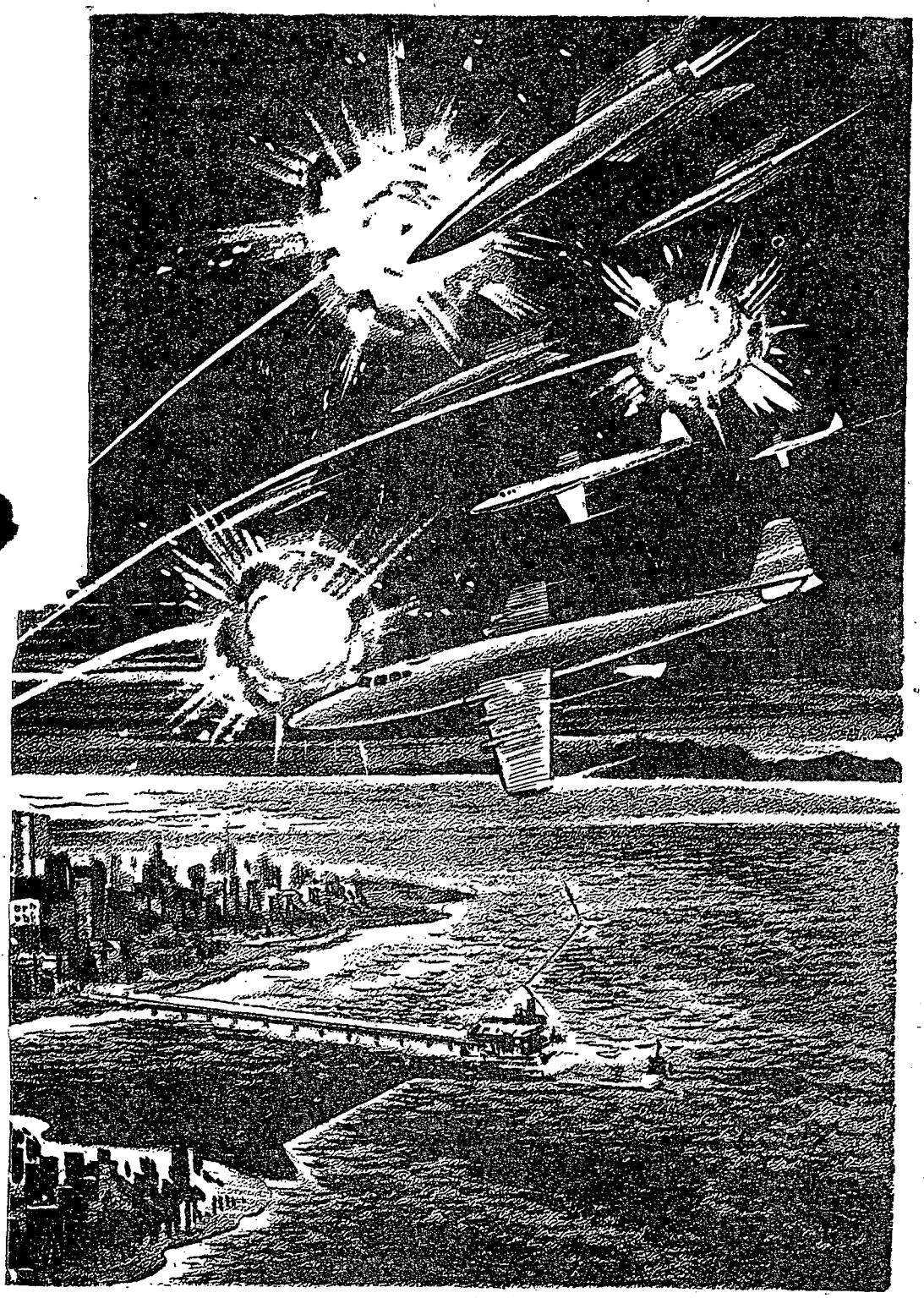

The city threw up a screen of fire, but the great ships came on, hurling their burdens of death . . .

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The formation was approaching the famous dead city of Chicago, and Jones wanted a glimpse as they soared over it.

As he watched, the outer edges of the ancient city appeared, the outlines of its roads and suburbs scarcely discernible through encroaching vegetation. Then the formation was over the city itself, and Jones' eyes widened at the tremendous panorama which spread below. Chicago was vast—fully as large, even, as it was claimed to be. Jones could find little room for doubt within himself now but that this city had actually sheltered five-million people in those golden days before the Plague, as legend held. In a world where now less than two million people existed—not counting androids—it had seemed incredible that such a great number could have been gathered in one place at one time. Why, Illintropolis, the capitol city of Illinois and the second largest in America, possessed little more than six-hundred thousand inhabitants.

Because of the altitude and the speed at which the formation was flying, Jones could make out little detail of the city. But his trained skyman's eyes told him that it had fallen greatly into ruin. Outlines of streets and avenues were blurred with debris from fallen buildings, and there were large patches of green where aggressive plants and weeds had managed to gain footholds in such soil as had formed from dust and rubble.

The formation roared along, and still the city unrolled below. Jones found himself wondering how five million people could have lived and moved within even a place so vast. He remembered the tales he had often heard in barracks about the buildings being so huge that one alone could house hundreds. And there were supposed to have been thousands of buildings like that, mounting story upon story into the sky, and all connected by a three-dimensional network of walks and roads.

IT WAS HARD for Jones to believe it. Chicago had been a surface city, and for a surface city to have spread seemed incredible. Of course, the Scienties explained it by saying that the continent of America had once been united under one government, instead of being divided up into almost a dozen independent states as now. They also claimed that there had been no internal strife of any kind—that, in fact, all nations of the world had been united for the preservation of peace. To Jones, product of a feudal age on a grand scale, where each state fought bitterly and incessantly with the other, this seemed nothing more or less than utopian exaggerations typical of the imaginative Scienties. Jones knew they got their information from the old books, and these had been copied and recopied so many times during the course of centuries, with so many personal additions by the copyists, that their original contents in most cases had degenerated almost into myth.

Jones, however, considered this little if any reflection upon Scienties in general, for in common with all others of his time, he had an immense respect for them. The Scienties were responsible for the preservation of much of pre-Plague culture. It was they who, in centuries long past, had dared the countless dangers of the dead cities to salvage the old books, tools, and machines. Even now occasional expeditions were made to investigate libraries, museums, factories, and ancient universities, for such material as earlier searchers might have missed. The Scienties had not only kept the ancient knowledge

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alive, but had added to it with discoveries of their own, in every field from chemistry to metallurgy. Most famous of them all was Arch-Scienty Bron Draper, the creator of androids. Draper made no secret of the fact that his achievement had been built upon a foundation laid by the others who had existed before the Plague. But the fact that he had been able to correlate all this ancient knowledge and add to it from researches of his own, to the extent where androids finally became an actuality, made it an achievement nonetheless.

Jones took a deep breath, wishing he hadn't thought about Arch-Scienty Bron Draper. The man and androids were synonymous, and androids were a subject which Jones wanted to keep out of his mind as much as possible. Just the barest thought of it had brought the old bitterness out around his mouth. The city below lost something of its interest.

Jones glanced at the formation spread out across the sky. At once he felt better. He was proud to be a part of this magnificent martial display. Proud, too, that he had responsibility and rank. These were achievements of which few of his kind could boast. There was comfort in the knowledge, and he told himself, in spite of all else, that it was something he must never forget.

Jones glanced slowly through the observation shell at his left, out to where Captain Van Selby was leading the left wing of Squadron Two. He must never, forget, he reminded himself again. Even in spite of Selby.

The bitterness deepened around his mouth, and then he shrugged. Kathie Jonothan was Selby's kind, so he had nothing to lose. She could never be for him—not the daughter of Pol Jonothan, the Governor of Illinois. He had to be content with responsibility and rank. These things were not denied his kind and could be gained. He must not forget that.

WHEN JONES glanced down again, Chicago had been left behind, and the formation was cutting across the lower end of Lake Michigan, toward the nation of Michigan. It wouldn't be long now, Jones thought, and excitement bubbled again within his veins. As soon as the formation reached the capitol city of New Lansing, it would be in the thick of one of the biggest battles that had ever been fought.

Allies. Jones rolled the word around the tongue of his mind and found it strange. It was the first time within his experience that the ruler of one nation had deliberately gone out of his way to aid the ruler of another, as Governor Pol Jonothan was doing now. The appeal for aid from Governor Harv Adams of Michigan had come in at dawn. Anton Corrant, the self-styled President of Eastern America, had captured the three lesser cities of Michigan and now was striking directly at the defenses of New Lansing itself. Pol Jonothan had wasted no time in deliberation, but had sent out the Illinois Royal Air Force at once to aid Governor Adams.

Action of this kind was unusual, but Jones remembered that Pol Jonothan was always doing unusual things. Other rulers waged war for loot in the form of tools, weapons, and androids, or in general merely to take these from their enemies and thus materially weaken them. Pol Jonothan fought only for peace. He sought nothing from those he conquered, save their promises that they would not bear arms against him again, that they would allow their respective peoples to intermingle freely in the profitable exchange of knowledge and of goods. In this way

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he had formed many friendships, and in this way there had been peace between Illinois and its surrounding states for many years, accompanied by brisk and prosperous trade between them.

Anton Corrant was unusual, too. He fought not for tools, weapons, and androids, leaving conquered states weakened though intact. He fought for territory and ever more territory, ruthlessly exterminating his opponents as he went. He was now overlord of the entire eastern portion of America, flaunting the august title of president. To Jones and all others of his time, the word held none of its original meaning. President meant emperor in the same way that governor meant king.

Corrant was pushing forward still further, having this time struck as far inland as Michigan. And Jonothan had allied himself with that beleagured state. It was hard for Jones to understand. He did not realize that the times had ripened for this very thing—that the day of feudal states was nearing its end. Art, science, and industry had not only reached their pre-Plague level of development, but had gone beyond it. Under the shrewd, capable hands of the quiet, retiring Scienties, civilization had flowered anew—and more gloriously. The old rocket craft hummed again through the air—higher, faster, and farther. The first, crude atomic engines were safer, more efficient, giving out heat and light, running vast factories that turned out thousands of different products. And androids worked side by side with their human brethren, taking the places now of those others who were yet to come. Jones was not aware that the old days could not remain under such progress. He was not aware that both Jonothan and Corrant typified the trend of the times. He was not aware that a new age was dawning.

The age of empire.

The shores of Michigan appeared on the horizon. Flight Commander Cris Hallan, leading the formation, spoke briefly into the radio.

"We'll take them from sixty-thousand feet. Follow Maneuver Two. At New Lansing, squadron commanders will take over."

Major Leron Ives, Squadron Commander of Squadron Two, connected in. He directed his words to the men of his own command.

"That means we come in from the east. Watch the rear for reinforcements."

The formation broke up, squadrons banking to right and left, climbing higher and ever higher into the morning sky. Jones fed power into the underjets and watched the needle of the altitude indicator climb. At 60,000 feet, Squadron Two levelled off and headed east. Came finally the order for which Jones had been waiting.

"Wing leaders will take over. Down and at 'em!" Major Ives crisped.

Squadron Two broke up into three units, forming the ends of a triangle, and each led respectively by Major Ives, Captain Selby, and Jones. They swooped down.

New Lansing rushed up to meet them—or at least that portion of it visible on the surface, consisting of parks and forts. Jones saw instantly that something was wrong. No enemy aircraft filled the sky. And then he saw the evidences of a terrible struggle. Rocket planes littered the ground, and smoke still arose from bomb craters, Many of the forts had been knocked out. Either, Jones thought, Corrant had been repulsed, or—This latter guess was right.

Abruptly, anti-aircraft batteries opened up on the ground below. The sky became a hell of bursting shells. Almost the Illinois Royal Air Force

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had been caught.

"Up and put of it!" Jones gasped at his wing.

"Squadron Two will reform out of range!" Major Ives came in.

"We were too late," Flight Commander Hallan said, several minutes later. "Somehow or other, Corrant managed a lighting capture of New Lansing. He knew we were coming, and was waiting for us when we came. Back to base. Our orders were merely to aid—and there's nothing we can do now."

OFFICERS lounge in general barracks was crowded and noisy. Skymen and groundmen were gathered into gesticulating groups, and speculation ran rife through each.

The moment he entered the great room, Jones realized that something must have happened during the night. He glanced about him, wondering what could be responsible for such unusual animation.

A shout rose suddenly above the general clamor. "There's Jonesy. Let's ask him."

Jones grinned and advances to meet the group of five officers in skymen's uniforms who came hurrying toward him. They surrounded him excitedly.

"Heard about it yet, Jonesy?" asked Captain Arn Vervain of Squadron One.

Jones shook his head. "I just got up. What happened?"

"A bunch of special state ships arrived here at Illinitropolis last night," Captain Ron Welch of Squadron Three explained. "The kind of super deluxe jobs governors ride around in. The hanger andies say they came from seven different states."

"What do you think it means, sir?" queried Lieutenant Vic Badden of Squadron One.

Vervain nudged Welch. He said, "Jonesy ought to know if anyone does. He has some excellent connections."

Jones shrugged, somewhat abashed under the meaningful grins of the others, and ran his hand self-conciously over his smooth cap of blond hair. He new Vervain meant none other than Kathie Jonothan, and it ruffled his otherwise assured poise.

Welch prompted, "Come on, Jonesy, what do you make of the set-up?"

Jones shrugged again. "I haven't seen any of the connections you fellows hint at—but I can make a guess. Either those were representatives coming to ask Governor Jonothan for help against Corrant, or else Governor Jonothan called them in."

The men began to argue the respective merits of each opinion. Rank was forgotten in the fervor of the controversy—but Jones knew all were good friends who never paid it much attention anyway. He watched them, his serious, brown eyes wistful. They were his friends, too, and though they seemed never aware of the barrier between him them, Jones knew it was still there.

"Oh, oh, here comes the wonder boy!" Welch said suddenly.

"See you later, Jonesy," Vervain said.

The group broke up, and it was somehow as though a light had gone out. Jones looked around slowly. Captain Van Selby had entered the lounge. Obviously, he had been approaching the group when it broke up. Selby stood alone now, a tall, elegant figure, his dark, hawkishly-handsome features sardonically amused. He ignored Jones pointedly, turned, and made his way over to another group of officers, who, in spite of their high rank, seemed flattered by his presence.

Captain Van Selby. Jones mentally stressed the title. He knew it could have been colonel, or general, or any

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other below that of governor which Selby might have wanted. For through Selby's veins flowed blood fully as royal as that of Governor Jonothan himself. The son of Governor Wal Selby of Pennsylvania, he had fled here to Illinitropolis after his own state had gone down early in the beginning of Corrant's plan of conquest. That had been about two years ago, Jones reflected. A coincidence—for as nearly as he could determine, that was as long as he had been in Illinitropolis himself.

AS JONES strode slowly from the lounge, he caught a reflection of himself in a polished chromium column, and he marveled again at the close resemblance between himself and Captain Van Selby. There was the same slenderness of figure, the same hawkish cast of face. And his hair was as blond as Selby's, his skin just as darkly sunburned. Jones frowned at the old inchoate stir of memories in his brain, frowned even deeper when they faded like mist before the groping fingers of recollection as they always did.

Jones shrugged, reminding himself that he wasn't going to start worrying about those elusive bits of memory again. Nor Captain Van Selby either.

Still, Jones could not dismiss from mind the queer fact that Selby should be content with the rank of captain when he could have had his choice of any of the higher ones merely for the asking. Of course, Jones knew the story behind it, but somehow it did not satisfy. Selby had claimed, upon entering Illinitropolis, that he would not presume upon his royal blood, but that he wished to be treated as any immigrant refugee. He had taken service in the Illinois Royal Air Force, and had proceeded to work his way up. Many called it a noble gesture, and admired him for it. Certainly, it had impressed Governor Jonothan, to the extent where it was now common knowledge that Selby had been chosen as his son-in-law. But to the majority of skymen, Selby was known as "the wonder boy," and was disliked for the reason that his royal blood made his advances in rank a foregone conclusion.

Jones knew that this seeming unfairness of competition was not the only reason for Selby's unpopularity. Selby was not generally liked, because he wasn't—well, likeable.

Jones was not the kind to be overly conscious of it, but he was aware that he was liked for almost exactly the same reasons Selby wasn't. He, too, came to Illinotropolis an outsider. He, too, had taken service in the Illinois Royal Air Force. And he had paced Selby all the way, until now, almost two years later, both were captains in the service.

In other circumstances, Jones knew, the outcome might have been different. His rank was merely the result of opportunities of which he'd had sufficient ability to take advantage. He had come to Illinitropolis at a time when Governor Jonothan had started enlarging all branches of military service against the growing threat of Corrant, and there had been urgent need of capable officers.

A patrol flight occupied Jones until late afternoon. When he returned to his room in barracks, he found a note awaiting him.

"I'll be at the usual place this evening, if you'd care to come.

K.J."

It was from Kathie Jonothan.

Jones folded the note slowly, aware that his breathing had quickened. He'd told himself that he must never see her again—that it would never come to anything anyway. He, a common soldier—and she, a gov-

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ernor's daughter. They were worlds apart.

Yet he felt the old excitement again, and he knew he always would. He would never be able to get her out of his mind. Bitterness filled him at thought of the future. Kathie married to Van Selby— For himself, responsibility and rank. He tried desperately to accept it, tried desperately to remember all the resolutions he had made—and failed.

Jones sat down on the edge of his bed, and ran finers agitatedly through his blond hair. His mind went back to that day, two years ago, when he had awakened, and Kathie's eyes and Kathie's hair had been his introduction to a strange, new world. He'd learned later that he had crashed near the royal pavilion on the surface, and Kathie had been among the first to reach him. He recalled vividly her daily, secret visits to the hospital.

THAT CRASH had done something to his mind. The doctors at the hospital had called it "amnesia," a term apparently derived from pre-Plague books. A mental barrier had formed, shutting away every slightest memory of himself and his past.

With the approach of evening, Jones took a shower and donned his dress uniform. A pedestrian ramp took him down to the sixth transportation level, and he boarded a train headed for the metropolitan section of subterranean Illinitropolis.

Jones took a seat, inwardly disturbed. He'd caught a glimpse of the motorman when the train stopped to let him aboard. An android, with its pale, perfect face, and its great eyes, expressionless and dark. Nothing unusual about that, for Draper androids performed routine tasks over all the face of America. They were tireless and strong, amazingly efficient. Yet there was a lack about them difficult to describe. They ate, and moved, and thought, and saw—but somehow they were not *alive*. Missing in them was that quality of life possessed by human beings. Androids were merely perfect replicas of real people, incredible automatons—super robots, in a word.

Sight or thought of androids never failed to agitate Jones. At the merest, mental whisper of the word, a whole host of memories would swarm against that barrier in his mind, pounding, battering, demanding to be let through. Yet though he bit his lips in aching concentration, straining to remember until sweat beaded his forehead, not one memory would come through. There were other times when a word or a scene would lead suddenly to heart-quickening vistas of recollection, but always they faded upon approach, like mirage or illusion.

Jones had the uncanny feeling that some tremendously important event of his former life was bound up with androids. If he could determine just how, the riddle of himself would be solved.

But he was afraid to learn—horribly, cringingly afraid. For there was always the hideous possibility that he had no past; that, in fact, the reason why thought of androids distrubed him was because he himself was—

With a fierce, frantic effort of will, Jones pushed the subject from his mind. He left the train several stations before Palace Square and took the pedestrian ramps to the surface.

Dusk was settling over the park-like expanses of the upper world. Jones took certain unfrequented paths known to him lead in the general direction of the royal pavilion. As he approached, nearer and nearer, his steps unconsciously quickened. Only dimly was he aware of the fascinating qualities of the surface, the

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feel of wind and the smell of grass. He was listening for the twinkle of a fountain, and at last it came.

The fountain was in the center of a tiny clearing, effectively screened with trees and shrubs, through which could be glimpsed the camouflaged exterior of the royal pavilion, some thirty yards away. There were two women seated on a stone bench that circled the fountain. Jones strode forward slowly until at last they turned.

"Captain Jones?" The voice was soft, hesitant.

He bowed. "At your pleasure, highness."

Kathie Jonothan's voice quickened. "Leave us, Nada."

The other women rose left. Jones had a moment's glimpse of the exquisite features of an android girl. She was, he knew from past experience, Kathie's personal maid.

"You received my note? Kathie Jonothan asked.

He bowed again. "I was honored."

Kathie laughed, a silvery tinkle not unlike that of the fountain itself. "From the formality, I can see it put you on your guard. Evidently, you share the general opinion that little good is to be expected from summonses emanating from the royal quarters. I assure you motives were of the best. I was just well—rather lonesome. And so much has been happening lately, I just had to talk it over with someone who could assist me intelligently. So drop the formality, Captain Jones, and do sit down."

Jones seated himself on the bench beside her, filled with an aching wistfulness at her nearness. They talked, and gradually his reserve wore off. Bit by bit he learned of which he had formerly been aware only as rumor and speculation.

GOVERNOR Jonothan had sent out invitations to the rulers of those neighboring states directly menaced by Corrant, to sit in on a special council of war. According to Kathie, only two had shown up. The others had merely sent ambassadors.

Nor had this been the only disappointment. The conference itself had failed miserably in its purpose. Governor Jonothan had asked for an allied union of states, a pooling of them and materials in a common cause. He had pointed out that indications showed conclusively Corrant would not stop until he had all America within his power. Divided as the states were at present, they would fall. United against Corrant, they had a chance of survival.

Jonothan had asked that they unite until the menace presented by Corrant had been removed. His arguements had been clear and convincing. He had shown that any other course would lead to disaster. Yet when he had called for the decisions of those present, only the two rulers there had joined. The ambassadors had hedged and hemmed, and said they would confer first with their rulers, announcing their decisions later.

"They're blind, bound to convention," Kathie finished bitterly. "They don't realize that the day of the independent, self-sufficient state has gone, not only economically, but politically also. Civilization has advanced to the point where there simply must be co-operation between states—if not the peaceful kind sought by father, then that reached by force, as with Corrant. Either way, the trend has shown itself. Do you recognize it, Captain Jones?"

He shook his head.

"Empire," Kathie murmured. "Co-operation at its ultimate."

Abruptly, there came the sound of soft handclapping. Jones looked up to see Captain Van Selby stride toward them. He wondered how much the

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other had overheard before he had chosen to reveal his presence.

Selby's face, when it was near enough to be seen in th dusk, was twisted in a mocking smile. "An interesting conclusion, Kathie," Selby drawled. "I wasn't aware you were so politically enlightened."

"I am—with certain people," Kathie retorted coolly.

"Androids aren't people," Selby said, with heavy sarcasm.

Jones stood up slowly. Pain and rage thickened his voice so that he hardly recognized it when he spoke. "Good evening, highness," he said, bowing to Kathie. "I shall be glad to speak with you again when my presence will not be the cause of any unpleasantness."

Kathie Jonothan rose and caught his arm, all in one, smooth motion. "A moment, Captain Jones." She turned to Selby. "Captain Selby, your insinuation to the effect taht Captain Jones is an android was not lost upon me. Either you do not know all the facts in his case, or else you are maliciously distorting them. Whichever it is, that remark was uncalled for, and I demand you apologize to Captain Jones."

Selby stiffened. He said harshly, "You have no right to demand an apology from me for another man. Don't forget you've been promised to me, Kathie. That makes you as much my property now as you will be after we're married. Kindly remember your place."

Jones gently disengaged his arm from the girl's clasp. He bowed again, not trusting himself to speak, and hurried away.

Android! The word dimmed in his mind.

The doctor at the hospital had made exhausting tests. They had pronounced him humor Yet was he? Could he be certain?

If he was actually a human being, why had he been wearing the uniform of an android pilot when he crashed? What had that android identification tag been doing around his neck? The doctors at the hospital had showed these to him, told him to concentrate, to try to remember....

Had Arch-Scien Bron Draper done the impossible? Had he created an android type indistinguishable from human beings?

The old questions, the old uncertainty, the old fears, beating at his mind. And no answers, no comfort anywhere.

When Jones arrived back at barracks, it was to learn disquieting news. The state of Kentucky had fallen before another of Corrant's lightning-like assults. Further invasion forces were now striking at the state of Ohio in a vast princer movement.

CAPTAIN JONES learned later that Kentucky and Ohio had been among the states represented by ambassadors at Governor Jonothan's council of war. They had been among the procrastinating majority at Jonothan's suggestion of union. Their respective plights now showed clearly the disastrous results of hesitation before a very real danger.

The rulers of the states of Indiana and Wisconsin, who had appeared personally at the conference and joined with Jonothan, were now further augmented by those of Iowa and Kansas-Missouri An enheartening move, yet reports from Palace Square showed it did little to ease Governor Jonothan's intense disappointment at the greater number of states which still held back.

The outlook for the future was bleak, for the only hope against Corrant now lay in a powerful allied

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union of states, and this had as yet failed to materialize. There was little doubt, however, that as events became increasingly serious, the withholding states would eventually join. But it was feared this would take place too late to accomplish any good. Jones knew union was not brought about by anything as simple as the mere nod of a ruler's head. It presented hundreds of problems in all the aspects of co-ordination of different sky and ground forces, unification of commands, manufacture and transportation of supplies, and the distribution of these to the different allies. Each new state that joined brought on additional problems, and until these were settled and the state itself added as an efficiently functioning limb to the whole, it was virtually useless. The time to consolidate against Corrant was now, while he was still occupied with other conquests. Once he struck, the problems of union, added to those of war, would result in chaos.

From guarded talks in officers' quarters, Jones learned the reasons for Corrant's power and the swift growth of his empire. In every state, it seemed, there were discontented minorities whose aid could be gotten very easily by promises of wealth and power Thus these formed the nuclei of puppet administrations. Entire sky and ground forces themselves, rather than be herded in prisons, would join on the side of Corrant for rewards of loot and higher pay. Thus Corrant was like a snowball rolling down a hill, gathering size and speed as he went.

Yet there was an undercurrent of general feeling that these were not the only reasons. Some deeper, more insidious explanation lay behind Corrant's incredible successes. What it was, however, none dared yet say.

No appeal for aid had come in from Ohio, and in view of the fact that this state had not been receptive to his plan of union, Governor Jonothan did not volunteer any help. Moreover, the fall of Ohio seemed certain, and he saw no need to waste ships and men on a hopeless cause.

A thin trickle of frightened refugees flowed from Ohio into Indiana and Illinois. It was a small group of these which reported the fall of Ohio, accomplished less than three days after Corrant had struck.

For more than a month, nothing further happened. There was little doubt in the minds of everyone that Indiana would be next. This state lay directly in Corrant's road of conquest.

With frantic haste, the defense forces of Wisconsin, Indiana, Kansas-Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa were made ready. And then the first blow, aimed directly at the allied states themselves, fell. Simaltaneously, from Michigan, Ohio, and Kentucky, Corrant's forces swept into Indiana.

The action seemed simple and understandable at first. A short time later it was to be learned that the attack was but the first step in a much more complicated and terrible plan.

THE ALLIED aerial armada thundered in to the defense of Indiana. Corrant met them solidly with a force no whit less large. The fight which followed was short and horrible. Against Corrant's aerial fleet alone, the Allies might have had a chance. But bewilderingly and stunningly, the anti-aircraft defenses of Inidana itself were turned against them.

As if this were not sufficiently demoralizing, the incredible alarm came in that the Allied states themselves were being attacked.

The Allied armada broke up, rushing to the defense of their respective states. Now the plan revealed itself.

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Each fleet found the ground defenses of its own state turned against them.

There was but one explanation, and this in turn explained the successes of Corrant's swift conquests. He had organized fifth column forces within each state. These had long been in preparation, needing only the order to go into action. That order, within the allied states, had come at last.

Dismayed at first by the treachery of those within their own state, the Illinois Royal Air Force now swooped down like avenging furies. Oblivious to losses, they battered again and again at the ground defenses, silencing them one by one with bombs and aerial cannon. At last these were wiped out. Troops and tanks were landed. An entrance was blasted into the subterranean city, and the troops fought their way in, inch by bloody inch. Finally the traitors were routed, all organized resistance on their part crushed. Except for the remaining task of mopping up, Illinitropolis was once more in rightful hands.

The rescue of the city had come none too soon. Governor Jonothan and a handful of loyal aids had been fighting off attempts at capture. A few hours more, and they would have been forced to surrender.

Corrant allowed the defenders of Illinitropolis no rest. That very night an attacking fleet swooped in. The city fell under seige.

The sky was sowed with aerial mines. This hampered the movements of the attacking ships. Meanwhile, a steady stream of emergency ground defenses was being rushed to the surface, to replace those which the defenders of Illinitropolis had earlier been forced to knock out.

Jones operated a giant anti-aircraft cannon until dawn. Relieved at last, he returned to barracks, staggering with exhaustion, filled with a burning need for food and rest.

But there was to be no rest for him. Halfway through his meal, he was told that someone wished to see him—that it was urgent. He hurried out to find Nada, Kathie Jonothan's android maid, awaiting him.

Something about her presence here made him feel a cold rush of alarm. He stared, demanded abruptly, "What is it? Has something happened to Kathie?"

Nada nodded slowly. "I regret so, Captain Jones. She was kidnapped by Captain Van Selby. He had escaped from the city with her."

"But it doesn't make sense!" Jones gasped. "Why should he have done a crazy thing like that?"

"Because Captain Van Selby was the leader of the traitors in the city," Nada replied. "When his plan of capture was defeated, there was nothing else he could do."

EXHAUSTION was suddenly unbearably heavy upon Jones. He felt unutterably weary of events gone so unreasonably mad. And then purpose flowed back into him. His eyes sharpened upon the face of the android girl before him. He asked:

"Governor Jonothan—does he know what happened?"

Nada's gaze dropped. "He has enough to worry him. I feared the result of what this further misfortune might do."

"But why have you come to me?" Jones demanded.

"I thought you would want to know," Nada responded. "Kathie loves you."

"She what!" Jones stared at Nada. The information was incredible. It just couldn't be true. Yet he knew android psychology sufficiently to be certain that Nada wouldn't have said so if it wasn't. And somehow the knowledge made him feel personally

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responsible for Kathie Jonothan's safety.

Jones straightened slowly. There was but one thing to do. He was alone. Alone he could accomplish nothing.

"Return to your quarters," he told Nada. "I will see Governor Jonothan. He must know about this."

Because of the emergency confronting the city, the trains on all transportation levels were not running. Jones took to the nearest ramps and descended to the third vehicular level. There he commandeered a military supply truck and was driven to Palace Square.

There was some difficulty about his getting in to see Governor Jonothan. But a scribbled note brought results.

The ruler of Illinitropolis received Jones in a small, private room just off the military conference chamber. His handsome face was haggard, his thick, grey hair awry. The resplendent uniform which he wore was dishevelled, the collar open at his throat.

Governor Jonothan looked keenly at Jones. "I checked up on your note," he said slowly. "It's true—Kathie's vanished. How did you learn of it, Captain Jones?"

"From your daughter's android maid, Nada," he answered. "It seems she feared to tell you personally."

Jonothan nibbled his mustache, grey eyes bleak. "This is bad. Captain Van Selby was obviously in league with Corrant, which means he must have fled to Corrant's headquarters with Kathie. If Corrant decides to use her as a hostage—"

He did not finish. The door to the military conference chamber suddenly opened. A man in the uniform of a general burst into the room. "Something's happening topside, Governor!" he rapped out. "I suggest that you see it."

Jonothan beckoned to Jones and strode quickly into the adjoining room. The first thing Jones noticed was that it was filled with officers of the highest rank. Then he saw the tables, all littered with maps and charts. One entire wall was covered with television sets. The screens of only three of these were lighted. Jones guessed the topside receivers of the others had been destroyed by bombs.

Escorted by Jonothan, Jones found himself standing presently before one of the television sets. He gaped at the scene shown. Corrant's aerial hordes literally filled the screen, a seemingly limitless swarm of darting motes. And yet, from out of the sky to the west, came more!

Jones shook his head hopelessly. Against such overwhelming odds, Illinois could not long hope to stand.

Fascinatedly, he watched the reinforcing fleet grow larger and ever larger. And then he gasped. It was impossible—c r a z y—but he recognized the ships now as the Science City Fleet—the personal armada of Arch-Scienty Bron Draper! Jones watched, not daring to think. Was it possible that Draper had allied himself with Corrant?

WITHIN seconds he learned the answer. It came with such unexpected suddenness, that he could not restrain the shout of joy which burst from his lips.

The Science City Fleet burst squarely into the midst of Corrant's forces. What seemed to be pale, violet rays flicked out suddenly from their bows. And where the rays touched, Corrant's attacking ships dropped in flames to the ground!

The utter shocking surprise of it held Corrant's men momentarily spellbound. And during that moment, literally scores more were destroyed.

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Corrant's fleet broke up in sudden panic, scattering all over the sky in hopeless confusion. More and still more fell. There was no thought of fight in the minds of the survivors. They sent full power into their drive jets and blasted away.

A little over ten minutes after they had appeared, the Science City Fleet was master of the sky!

The ships now dropped signal flares. Contact was then made by a radio. Arch-Scienty Bron Draper requested to see Governor Jonothan!

It was a meeting that made history. Jones was never to forget it—nor was he ever to cease marveling over the whim of Fate which enabled him to be present to see it.

Arch-Scienty Bron Draper was very tall and very thin, clad in the traditional robe and hood of the Scienties. His blue eyes were very clear and bright, and lines of humor showed at their corners. His bony face showed at once a shrewd intelligence and a warmth and depth of human understanding.

Jonothan and Draper gripped hands. For a long moment it was very still in the great chamber. Then Jonothan spoke:

"I owe you a dept of gratitude which I fear I shall never be able to repay. You came at a most welcome moment."

Draper gestured depracatingly. "It was about time I got into the fight." His blue eyes twinkled with something like mischief. "And I was itching to try those heat beams my technicians turned out. As it is, I'm well satisfied." Draper threw back his hood and folded his arms. The humor died from his eyes.

"No doubt, Governor Jonothan, you are wondering just why I am here and also what prompted my aid in your behalf. I shall explain."

And he did. Listening, Jones learned of the Plan, and a vast awe deepened within him.

According to Draper, there had been Scienties even in pre-Plague days. It was these discovered or at least laid the foundations for many of the miraculous scienty devices used in the world today—the rocket plane, the atomic engine, the television set. It was a pre-Plague scienty who had made the discoveries in biochemistry later to result in androids. And it had been a group of pre-Plague scienties who had been indirectly responsible for the Plague.

This group had perfected a wonderful kind of rocket plane called a space ship. In it men had gone to the Moon, and later to Mars. Then a flight had been made to Venus. As a result of this trip, an alien bacteriophage was transported to Earth. It did not reveal itself immediately. With what amounted almost to a kind of viciously calculating intelligence, it waited, spread itself over all the world. Then, like an atomic explosion flowing over the planet, it struck.

Out of the billions which had populated Earth so thickly, only a few scattered millions were left. The alien bacteriophage itself, its deadly work done, inexplicably vanished.

THE REMAINING scienties had banded together, forming the nucleus of the order which was later to spread its influence over the entire world. Upon themselves they took the task of preserving civilization. They gathered up all the available knowledge in every field. This they taught to each new generation.

Thus civilization began gradually to rise again. But in one respect it was not the same. America, once a united nation, now become composed of dozens of independent states—kingdoms, in essence—each of which

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waged incessant and ruthless war on the other.

The scienties knew this state of political affairs was likely to continue for hundreds of years, delaying the full flower of civilization which came only with empire. So they had formed the Plan. They had come out from their little republic on the west coast, and in each and every state they had formed an institution which they called a university. Here they sought converts, and within these they instilled the dream of empire.

But the number of recruits was too few to accomplish any good. And most disappointing, men did not catch the true Scienty picture of empire. Their visions were distorted ones, for each saw himself the lord and master of a vast kingdom which spread from one end of the continent to the other. What the Scienties wished to bring about was a large scale model of their own tiny republic.

The seed was there—but the ground was too barren for planting. The Plan had to await the coming of Bron Draper and androids.

Draper's voice deepened. "The ground was still barren, but in androids we Scienties saw a seed which would take root and flower regardless. The Plan was dusted off again. This time we felt little doubt but that it would succeed." He grinned wryly.

"And now comes the confession. I hope, Governor Jonothan, it will not make you think of us Scienties as treacherous and conniving. What we sought to accomplish was merely the ultimate good of all.

"To go on, androids were the perfect solution to the manpower problem. They are intelligent, strong, and tireless. They freed men from exhausting routine tasks, gave them a chance to work more with their minds. Thus, in two decades, their use has spread over the entire continent." Draper hesitated, went on:

"Androids were more than workers—they were the seeds of a Scienty plan of empire. In effect, they were a vast fifth column army, with units in every state. When we Scienties gave the word, they were to rise up and take over wherever they were. Then one single nation was to be formed from all the states. The government was to be modelled after our own republic, and Scienties were to be administrators until such time as men had been prepared to take over themselves.

"The date for all this, however, was still a good many years in the future. But Anton Corrant forced our hand. By his conquests, he was eliminating the very kind of men we needed to help us in our plan. He was setting up a particularly vicious kind of military state called a dictatorship. That this could be overthrown by means of our androids, we had no doubt—but we chose not to wait any longer.

"MOREOVER, Governor Jonothan, Anton Corrant has shown us the result of an empire built up by force. Resentments and enmities are kindled which make real co-operation impossible. A state of that kind cannot last. If empire is to come, it must come of its own volition. Therefore, we Scienties have abandoned our plan. Yet the androids—the seeds of empire—remain. What I propose to do is use them to overthrow Corrant. Internally, he is still quite weak, and once his influence is removed, conditions will settle quickly back to normal.

"But—the conquered states will be leaderless. New leaders can be found, yes, but in most cases these will be raw, hesitant, doubtful. They will need someone to look up to. Govern-

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or Jonothan, you have already laid the foundation for an allied union of states. These new rulers will now be glad to join, since it would insure political peace and thus remove much responsibility. Once the trend has started, other states will be sure to follow. Thus there will be no further danger from men like Corrant, and political peace will mean a new era of interstate commerce and prosperity.

"In return for my help, all I ask is that you preside over this union, to see that all states keep the peace and do their full and fair share of the work. Your successor can be appointed by vote. In states where new rulers have not yet been chosen, these can be appointed by vote also. Will you do it?"

Governor Jonothan hesitated; he was dazed. The idea seemed too big for him to grasp all at once.

But it was not necessary for him to decide. His men pressed forward, eagerly urging his acceptance, and at length he nodded. "I will do it."

Plans were quickly discussed. Aid was to be given first to Jonothan's allies. Then the androids within Corrant's territory were to strike. The Science City Fleet, in conjunction with those of the allies, was then to sweep in, mopping up.

Draper was dismayed when he learned that Kathie Jonothan had been kidnaped, and might now be a prisoner within Corrant's headquarters. "This complicates things," he said gravely. "Corrant might use her as a hostage, and thus spoil the entire plan."

Jones stepped forward. He said, "Sir, if as I presume you have a means of getting in contact with the androids within Corrant's headquarters in New York II, could it be arranged for a group of them to get the girl out of the city? If that could be done, a place could be designated on the outskirts of the city, and I could fly there to pick her up."

"An excellent idea!" Draper approved. "It can and will be done. But you'll be taking a dangerous risk, young man."

IT WAS night—and a perfect night for the task that lay before him, Jones thought. His rocket plane cruised along at an altitude of over 60,000 feet. The motors, functioning at their highest point of efficiency, made almost no sound.

Again he checked his position. The muscles in his face tightened. Almost there. He bent to the controls, making adjustments with skillful hands.

The rocket plane which he flew was of a special type, selected particularly for the mission. It had retractible wings. With the speed of the ship cut down and the wings run out, it performed excellently as a glider. In this way he could approach New York II without sound.

Jones cut power from the rear drive jets, and braked with those forward. Then, with wings extended, he began to glide toward the ground below.

Circling, then, he dropped UV flares and donned the scanning goggles. The terrain below was outlined in weird tones of grey. Jones picked out a meadow and landed. That done, he turned his attention to the radio, sending out the intermittent signals which would guide Kathie Jonothan's android rescuers to his ship.

He did not know how much later it was when it happened. Of a sudden, lances of blinding light smashed at him, as he and his rocket plane became the focus point for a battery of search beams!

Dazed, stunned, uncomprehending, Jones blinked into the brilliance. He

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became aware of voices.

"Got him!"

"Walked right into the radar net!"

"All right, mister, come out of there. We've got you cold!"

Shock and utter dismay held Jones as if in a stupor. He felt rough hands grab hold of him. Then he felt himself being driven in a ground cruiser, and he became conscious of the triumphantly grinning faces of men in uniform.

Shortly after, the cruiser stopped. They had reached New York II. Jones was hauled to his feet. There was a ride in a train, a walk down pedestrian ramps, and finally a swift ascent in an elevator.

Jones was ushered unceremoniously into a large room, where a powerful, bald-headed man sat at a desk. Thought and perception rushed back to Jones with stunning clarity. He faced Anton Corrant, self-styled President of the East!

Jones' guards saluted with strange, outflung motions of their arms. Their commanding officer stepped up to the desk.

"Leader, we bring you a prisoner. He was caught in a radar net over Sector 12. We did not shoot him down as he was already landing."

"Excellent work, Lieutenant," Corrant responded, in a crisp, bass voice. "You shall be remembered for this. Dismissed!"

The soldiers left, but two guards stepped up to Jones, bayoneted rifles held at the ready. Jones noted, curiously enough, that one was an android.

Corrant said, "Your name?"

Jones answered absently. His mind was toying with the formless clay of a plan.

"A captain in the Illinois Royal Air Force, eh?" Corrant said. His tones grew sharp. "Now, then, just what were you doing over my territory—and especially near New York II itself?"

"I was sent here as a spy," Jones answered, still absently. It was the first thing that occured to him. He did not trouble to find a better answer. His real thoughts were busy elsewhere—the clay was taking shape.

"A spy!" Abruptly Corrant laughed. "In military uniform? Come, Captain Jones, you surely don't expect me to believe that. You were sent here for some other reason. What was it?"

Jones barely heard the question. His pulses were leaping. The clay had formed!

Corrant snapped, "Answer me, man! Why were you sent here? I warn you, my time is valuable. If you continue hedging, I'll get the information out of you by much more forcible means."

Jones turned quietly to the android guard at his right. Still quietly, he said, "Draper sent me. The Plan goes into motion at once. Do your duty." With that, Jones whirled to the guard at his left. He gripped the rifle in his left hand, twisted it aside; his right smashed into the man's face. The guard went down, but not completely out. This was not a time for the niceties of combat—Jones kicked him in the face, and finally the man lay still.

WHEN JONES turned, it was to see the other android guard standing before the desk, the point of his bayonet pressed against Corrant's chest. Corrant sat there, a frustrated expression upon his heavy face, one hand frozen in mid-air, halfway to the button on the box of an inter-office communicator.

Jones picked up the rifle of the fallen guard and strode over. "Good work," he said, "I'll take over. See that the signal is sent to the others."

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The android saluted and left. With the rifle, Jones faced Corrant.

Corrant said thickly, "Don't be a fool. You can't hope to get away with this."

"We won't argue about that," Jones answered. He raised the rifle slowly, until the point of the bayonet touched Corrant's throat. "Now listen, you're going to use the communicator. Have the daughter of Governor Jonothan brought here at once. The wrong word, and we *both* die."

Corrant looked at Jones a long moment. Something like admiration came into his lidded gaze. He reached out to the communicator, pressed one of a set of buttons.

"Brandt, I want the daughter of Governor Jonothan brought to my office immediately." With that, Corrant sat back in his chair, and his dark eyes no longer held any expression at all.

A pulse throbbed in Jones' temple. The rifle grew heavy in his hands. Then:

"I'm going to stand behind the door, with the sights of this gun centered on your forehead." Jones told Corrant. "Only the girl must enter the room."

Corrant nodded slowly. Jones backed away, watching the other with a fixed, unblinking gaze. The point of the rifle never wavered from Corrant, not even as finally Jones took up a position to one side of the door.

At length, the door opened. Corrant said quickly, "Only the girl. Dismissed."

The door closed again, and Kathie Jonothan stood in the room. She said, "Well, what is the meaning of this?" And then she saw Jones, started toward him with a low cry.

"Stay away!" Jones gasped, without removing his attention from Corrant.

Kathie understood at once. She backed away, her small figure suddenly taut.

"The androids here in New York II are on our side," Jones told her. "No time to explain, but they're taking over the city. We wait here until they come. They'll see that we get away."

Abruptly, the door opened and a man burst into the room. He flung out, "Say, look here, Corrant, I thought it was understood you were to leave the girl alone. Are you trying—"

It was Van Selby. Jones saw this much when suddenly Kathie screamed.

Corrant leaped from behind his desk, hurled himself desperately at Jones. As Jones went down, he heard Van Selby shouting.

Corrant had caught Jones about the legs. Jones braced himself on the floor, lashed out with a knee. Corrant grunted as the kick struck him full in the face. His grip loosened. Jones struggled to his feet, reaching out for the fallen rifle. A clamor echoed in his ears, the shouts of men, the pound of footsteps.

He had the rifle. As he looked up, he saw Van Selby before him. The butt of an automatic showed in Selby's upraised arms, and there was strained purpose on Selby's face.

Jones tried to bring up the rifle, urgency screaming within him. He never made it. The butt of the automatic smashed down. Flame exploded within Jones' head. A blanket of unutterable blackness closed over it.

HE AWAKENED to find himself in a bed, bathed in a golden flood of sunshine which poured in through a window at his left. For a long moment he lay still, blinking in the light, while the processes of conscious thought stirred sluggishly into motion within his brain.

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By slow degrees, he became more fully aware of his surroundings. He saw that he was in a large exquisitely furnished room, and for a moment he was awed at its splendor. But only for a moment. He had known other rooms like this.

Pennsylvania, he thought. Pennsylvania had fallen, and the glory of the Selby's was no more. A cloud of sorrow descended upon him.

And then he was sitting bolt upright. The last thing he remembered, he had been in the rocket plane, and the parks of topside Illinois had been beneath him. What had happened? What was he doing in this bed?

Memories swarmed over him. He grinned wryly; of course, that was the answer. He remembered now that his fuel had run very low. He remembered how he had tried desperately to glide in to a landing when the fuel had finally given out. And he remembered his dismay when the ground had rushed up to meet him—fast, much too fast. A moment of pain, then nothingness, then this room.

He had come out alive after all.

But his joy was short-lived when he thought of what once had been. Corrant, he thought. Damn Corrant!

Corrant had struck with paralyzing suddenness. The forces of Pennsylvania had had no time to prepare. The attack had come both by enemy legions without and fifth column forces within. It was a group of these latter who had invaded the palace, killing Governor Wal Selby and his brave band of defenders.

Governor Wal Selby. His father.

He himself had managed to escape only because of Jones. Jones had been an android—and a clever one. It was Jones who had thought of the idea. He had demurred, but Jones had insisted. And so they changed clothing. Jones had led pursuit astray, and in the rocket plane he had escaped. Illinois had seemed the most likely place for refuge, and he had headed there. Then had come the crash.

The train of memories led him here, to this room. He surmised that the crash had been seen. He had been brought here.

It seemed a quite logical explanation—yet strangely he had the feeling that a much longer period of time had elasped since the crash and his awakening in this room. Vague memories troubled him—formless things that retreated before his attempts at recollection.

A SOUND caught his attention. The door to his room had opened. A girl entered. She smiled at him.

"Awake, Captain Jones?"

He did not know the name. Neither did he know why it was applied to him. But he did not worry about it. He looked at the girl, and suddenly the sunlight was warmer, more golden.

She sat down in a chair beside his bed. She smiled again. "Perhaps I ought to make a correction. You're Colonel Jones now, you know. Father saw to that."

It was very puzzling. But it was nice to have her near, and he said nothing.

The girl went on, "Selby tried to shoot you, there in Corrant's office, but the androids reached him befo e he had time. Both he and Corrant are now our prisoners. It was a group of androids that brought us back here to Illinitropolis.

"Incidently, Van Selby wasn't Van Selby at all, but another man masquerading under that name. It seemed he looked much like the real Van Selby, and so shortly after Pennsylvania was conquered, Corrant sent him here, to be the leader of the fifth

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column forces in Illinois. The real Selby was killed, when Pennsylvania fell."

He had the urge to tell her that Van Selby wasn't dead—that he was alive, here and now. But it would spoil this moment, and he wanted very much right now to have it last.

"Well, it's all over," Kathie said. "Corrant's empire is crumbling, and several conquered states have already joined with father. And he's as delighted about it as a boy. In a way, I'm rather glad, too, that he's finally realizing his dream of union. It'll mean peace for everyone." She leaned toward him, and her smile grew soft. "And no more fighting for you, Cap—Colonel Jones!"

He grinned. "That's swell!" he said. Later, he thought, he'd tell her his name was really Van Selby.

VEILED TRUTHS

By WALTER LATHROP

FABLES have long been used to signify, in fiction format, a moral doctrine. Usually a fable is of short length, with a dash of fantasy flaring into a moral code ending. And actually, that is what the fable was founded to represent.

In early times, especially in the East, it was necessary to veil the truth in fiction form. This was especially true in the case of slaves, who had to be careful at all times that what they said did not offend the ears of their masters. For a single thought, uttered aloud in the wrong manner could bring swift torture and death to the unwitting person audacious enough to utter it.

Thus it was that the fable was founded by a slave, whose name has since become famous throughout the centuries. For Aesop, the father of the fable, was himself a slave, and his fables have withstood the test of time, even as they withstood the sinister era of which he was a daring pilgrim.

While there need not always be a strict moral sense necessary in a fable, it is true that Martin Luther thought so highly of Aesop, that he edited and prefaced a volume of Aesop's work.

It is a tribute to our modern civilization that man is struggling to rise above the necessity of veiling the truth. Our own country was founded upon this tenet. That any man shall have the right to express himself openly, before all men. Today we can look upon the storiettes of Aesop and smile. But in his day they were taken seriously—especially by Aesop himself!

"CIVILIZATION'S" BIRTH

By L. A. BURT

WHEN WE speak of civilization we immediately think of our presentday world and all of the wonders that modern science has given us. And yet, the word civilization, in its true sense should imply the entire era in which man rose above the plane of savage existence.

Then when did "civilization" begin? Thousands of years ago, in the Neolithic period of man—the period we have come to know popularly as the "stone age."

And why has science determined that it was in this era that civilization in the true sense of the word was established? Because it was in this period that man discovered and developed four major industries, the forerunners of our great modern world. They were; agriculture, the domestication of animals, the manufacture of pottery, and tool-making.

The first two of these revolutionary changes for the neolithic man enabled him to rise above the precarious position his life was always in from want of food. He was now able to plan his diet in advance—and store enough food away for the long winter months so that his family would not be in dire threat of starvation. He also found out that a given area of land could easily support a larger number of people engaged in raising food than a smaller number who foraged and hunted. As a result the first great communal efforts were put forth by man.

Then with the final two discoveries, the advent of civilization was complete. For with the making of pottery, the building of the home followed as a natural result. Baked clay was utilized to its utmost advantage. And along with it, the art of tool-making contributed an important role. For those flint-edged tools of the "stone age" man were actually the basis for what engineers and contractors use today in constructing our giant skyscrapers!

* * *

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As Sain and the girl hid themselves behind the bushes close to the shoreline, they saw the huge metal globe rest on the surface of the lake and disgorge a horde of tiny men.

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The WEE MEN of WEEHEN

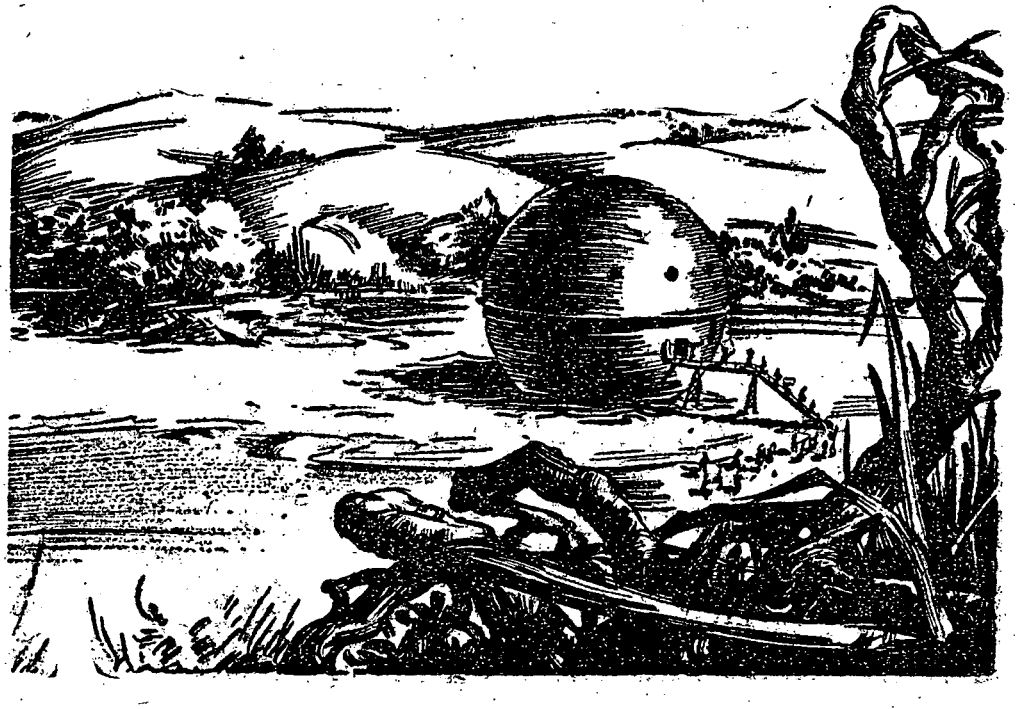
By LESTER BARCLAY

Were Sain's eyes deceiving him? Did he really see an army of incredibly small creatures advancing from the metal globe?

"SAIN," HENDON shouted, "we're gonna be invaded by these critters! I know we are. Flyin' saucers ain't natural. Atom bombs and such like are inventions of the devil. I'm tellin' you one of these days the whole world is gonna go to pot! Just like that!" He snapped his fingers to emphasize his point.

Agar Sain smiled as he joined his rod together. Good old Sam Hendon There had to be a boogie-man somewhere. Sam was always running a temperature about the latest scientific rumors. But Sam was a hell of a fisherman and knew the best trout waters anywhere in the hills. And so long as it didn't interfere with his nose for trout streams, Agar didn't care what the old man raved about.

Agar Sain's doctor had advised rest, specifically, a fishing v[illegible] when the burden of watching Sain's business had become a little wearing. Sain had contacted Hendon and the old guide had made ready the cabin for Sain. Two weeks had passed and Sain felt in the pink of condition



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again. He looked out of the window into the grey mist which was just lifting as the sun rose. Should be good weather for fishing he thought. There was a lake Sam had promised to take him to, a secluded place in the wilderness Agar had never seen, and which Sam had discovered only a short time before.

"Well, Sam," Agar said, "suppose we let others worry about such things and you and I go out and catch us a mess of fish?"

"Betcha we do, Agar," the old man said as he joined Agar at the door. "Big ones, too. But I tell ya, man—" he let the words trail off as Sain moved swiftly for the small car parked by the side of the cabin.

They had to park the car in a clearing a full mile from the lake. But Sain had to admit to the worthiness of the goal when he arrived behind the agile old man who took the high climb in his stride. Emerald-green, almost circular, it was pitched as if at the bottom of a wondrous bowl, completely surrounded by spruce, hemlock and pine. Sain wiped his brow, smiled, and patted the other man's arm.

"Sure is pretty, Sam," he said.

"An' the fish is even prettier," Sam replied. "Beauties. Four an' six pounders. An' I'm the only one knows 'bout this place. See there...." he pointed to a shelving piece of land which ran into the lake almost directly below them. "That's where you and I cast."

THE SUN was an hour from being directly overhead when the two cleaned the last of the fish they had caught. The old man had started a small fire and was preparing for the fish fry. Agar Sain whistled happily through his teeth as he watched the old man. It had been a most pleasant and profitable morning. Now he leaned back against the rough bark of the tree and looked out over the lake. It was so peaceful, so placid...

Afterward, Agar Sain couldn't say exactly what came first, the flash of flame or the whistling screeching noise. Perhaps neither came first. But suddenly there it was, the sound and the light. And afterward only the boiling of the lake near the center where the vast circular object had disappeared under the waters.

"Holy jumpin' crappies," Sam Hendon said softly. "See that?"

"I did," Sain said gently. "Only *what* was it I saw?"

"What? Why one o' those flyin' saucers, that's what."

"I can't swear to it." Agar said. "It happened too fast. Could have been one of those new swept-back planes. Yet it looked too large for that, At any rate, we'd better get back to town and report it."

* * *

WESTHAVEN, even in its flush years was a town of perhaps four thousand people. Now a complete census would show maybe half that many people. Yet despite its size it had one item known through the length and breadth of the state, its newspaper, owned and run by a woman, Fern Linden. It was to the *Argus Journal* that Agar Sain and Sam Hendon came with their story.

Fern Linden was in her office as the two marched in. She waved a greeting to the old man through the glass door partition between the outer and inner office. She smiled politely at Sain and motioned him to a seat as Hendon burst out with what they had seen.

"Now wait a minute, Sam," she halted his excited flow of words. "Let's not get too het up about this."

"I told you," Agar said in a wearied voice. "Let's go to the Sheriff's office."

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Fern switched her attention to the tall, dark-bearded stranger. Her blue eyes flashed sparks of anger. But her actions were studiedly casual as she placed a well-manicured hand to her blonde tresses piled high on her head. She even let a smile play on her lips.

"The Sheriff's slower than a snail," Hendon said in disgust. "Fern's got more gumption and git-up than him any day. Now look, gel. Neither me or Mr. Sain's been drinkin'. We saw thet flyin'...."

"Don't give it a name," Sain broke in. "Let's just say that it was a plane that fell into the water."

"All right," the woman said. "I'll send someone down to look at it."

"Thanks for nothing," Sain said. "I fell in with Sam's suggestion because I thought it might have been one of those large bombers and if it was, the army authorities ought to be notified. But just take your time."

Fern Linden bit her lip. This arrogant fool. Hang him. He was making a fool of her. And he was right, because whether they had seen something or not she could soon find out. She hoped, however, that there was nothing there. Just so that she could tell him what she thought from the first, that the jug had done yeoman service.

"Well, okay," she said. "I'll contact the proper people. And I'll let you know what they find. That is unless you're going to stay—"

"Sorry," Sain said. "My vacation ends today. just let Sam know."

BUT SHE didn't. She let Sain know directly.

It was a week later. The afternoon mail had come into his office and his secretary looked at the newspaper with an odd expression. Sain, busy on the phone, turned and asked:

"What's biting you, Mabel? You look like you tasted caviar for the first time."

It's this paper, sir," she said, handing it to him.

His face darkened in anger as he read the headlines and story in a two column spread on the first page. The story was right to the point and told about the smart-aleck from the big city who spread a cheap hoax around about flying saucers falling into Loon Lake. It also tore into the man, a certain Agar Sain, a well-known publisher, who had caused the community of Westhaven to spend money in a fruitless effort to trace down the so-called terror of the skies.

"Well, blast her!" Sain said savagely. "By George! I ought to run down there and spank her for this! I not only ought to, I will! Anyone, wants to know where I am, I'll be in Westhaven at Sam Hendon's"

* * *

Sam wasn't home when Agar arrived, but his sister was. She greeted him with affection and took his bag and started to show him to his room. But Sain stopped her by saying:

"Where can I find Sam? Or better, if Sam comes home tell him I'm down at the newspaper offices."

He rushed away before she could say anything.

Fern Linden turned as the outer door slammed and seeing who it was, smiled broadly.

"Well, if it isn't the bright young man from the big city," she called in greeting. "I suppose you've come down to tell me to jump in the lake or something."

His anger was suddenly gone. He realized instantly that something was wrong. She wouldn't have printed what she did unless they had investigated. But surely they would have

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found something...

"Mind if I sit down?" he asked. "I've got some questions I'd like answered."

"Go ahead. There might be a few I'd like answered myself."

He sprawled his lean length down and as he talked, he rubbed his hand along the muscular side of his jaw reflectively:

"I won't ask whether you sent out a party or not because it's obvious that you did. At the same time I wasn't having hallucinations. I *don't* drink, a fact you can corroborate with my physician. Something about allergies... At any rate, not only did I see it, the shape of this thing without giving it a title, but Sam Hendon also saw it. Now look.

"Sam Hendon has the sharpest eyes I know of. He can spot a trout sitting under a log from a hundred feet, and that takes eyesight. In the split second I saw it, I formed an idea of a circular mass or elliptical mass about a hundred yards across. We talked about it on the drive over and Sam concurred with me in general with a single exception. He said he saw ports in it. No matter. The point being that so large an object simply cannot disappear without leaving a trace."

Fern Linden had intended giving this man a royal ribbing, when she too realized that he was not just anybody, but a well-known publisher and a person of some standing and intelligence. Further, from the very way he spoke even now, there *was* something they had seen. Yet there was the evidence of the search party. They had found nothing. Nor had army headquarters reported any of their planes missing.

"Okay," she said. "Let's say something did land in the lake. What happened to it?"

"The trouble is," Sain said bluntly, "we don't think in coherent ways. Sam and I saw something. Yet nothing is found. Why look for devious reasons? Let's look for the obvious. It didn't fall in. It landed there, and having landed, took off again."

"Then for argument's sake, let's agree with you," Fern said. "Now what happened to it in the time you and Sam got here?"

The answer to that had to wait. They both lifted their heads at the sound of screeching brakes just past the windows of the newspaper offices. And their heads turned simultaneously at the sound of the outer door's slam. It was remarkable the speed Agar displayed when he saw who it was entering. He was just in time to grab Sam Hendon before he fell.

"HELLO, SON," Sam said weakly. "Just give me a couple of minutes. Takes more than a couple of bites like I got to make me give up. Whew! Those little varmints are nasty...

"I'm all right now. Well, Fern. It all began when you sent out the Sheriff's men and I went along and we didn't find anythin'. I thought my eyes'd pop when we got there and there wasn't anythin' to be seen. I *know* what we saw. So remember what I said, that I'd stick around till I found out what happened to it? I did.

"It happened today. I ain't been home in a week. Know why? Because I've been makin' camp out there on Loon Lake. An' today I found out. By gum, it's a flyin' saucer, all right. An' they got the thing hid away in a big clearing! Must be quarter mile across stuck right smack dab in the middle of the woods east of the lake."

He stopped and fell back in the chair, his eyes closed and his face suddenly drained of color.

"I'll get a doctor up here," Fern

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said, as she ran to her desk.

Sain's eyes narrowed as he looked closely at the old man's face. The skin looked as if it had been pricked by a hundred needles. Then the old man opened his eyes again and smiled weakly.

"...Whole thing's camiflaged... Must be couple hundred of the little critters.... Saw me an' shot arrows at me....ole Sam's too fast f'r 'em. Hah! Got away, I did—"

This time his eyes closed and stayed that way. Fern came and told Sain the doctor would be over in a matter of minutes. The medico was a man of his word. But though he arrived with a bag full of the tricks of his trade, not one could bring Sam Hendon out of his coma. Nor could the medical man say the reason for it.

The three of them, the two men and the woman, drove to the hospital in the doctor's car. Fern said she would stand all expenses. "In a way it was all my fault. I made fun of Sam. So I feel responsible."

Sain suddenly saw her in a differ ent light. He knew, also, that if he continued to see her, he would see many things about her he would like. Nor was he averse to the idea. She asked him to come back to the office after they left the hospital.

But Sain offered a better idea. He hadn't eaten since he had left the city and suggested a cafe close to the paper's offices. They discussed what had happened but came to the conclusion they were stymied until Sam regained consciousness.

"I wonder just what sort of 'critters' they were he saw?" Sain asked.

"We probably won't know until he is in condition to take us to the spot where he saw them," Fern said.

"Well, I'm of the opinion we shoudn't wait too long. The doctor had no idea when Sam would come out of it and how soon after he would be able to move," Sain said. "We'll give him a day, then get going on it."

SAGOR BAAT signalled to the control room for submergence. Then he turned to his second-in-command and said, "The needle darts will have caused the old man to lose consciousness by this time. After that, when he regains his reason he will have lost all memory of what happened. We cannot take any chances, however. He may have told someone what he saw. Therefore make ready the gas cylinders and prepare for flight."

Tavor San, at rigid attention nodded with an emphatic shake of his head, whirled on his heel and marched stiffly from the room, his two-feet six-inches of height, stiff as a ramrod. Sagor Batt sighed deeply as the door closed on the other and fell into deep thought.

He had always disliked dealing with large men. They always thought their size was of such vast importance in the scheme of things. It had been one of the reasons why they had left their planet many light years back. There were ten thousand men, women and children in their space sphere and they simply had to find a place to live. Sagor Baat knew it was not going to be any easy thing to do.

A red light flashed the signal that the control room was on the audophone. He dialed them to come on and the face of his engineer showed on the screen.

"We are resting on the bottom, sir."

"Throw the screen about us then," Baat said. "We will stay submerged till nightfall. I have told Tavor San that we will use the cylinders tonight." He could see the other nod his head as though in agreement with his own thoughts. "We have enough of the sleep-gas for our purpose.

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After that we will improvise as needs arise."

The screen went dark and Baat went back to his thoughts again. Two weeks. All they needed. After all they had spent months in flying about, months in search of a place of existence on this strange planet. Now they had found a body of water exactly like that on Weehen. Without this lake they could not live long. And two weeks would be all they would need. He sighed deeply again as he switched on the dormitory section. He could not sleep until he knew the others were comfortable.

But if Baat was worried about his charges, there were those who weren't. Tavor San, for one. The look of militant attention left his face the instant the door closed behind him and he was unobserved. A sly look crossed his face. So they wanted Baat as their leader—Well, there were others beside himself who thought as he did. Baat was too soft. Not like Tavor San or Hgam.

San moved swiftly along the dim lit corridor to the elevator midway on the deck. He set the button for the control room. Hgam would be waiting. Well, it was the end of all waiting. The Wee Men of Weehen were going to be the giants of this planet, the lords of this universe. San's jaw was set in lines of iron as the elevator rocketed down the five floors to the control section.

San pressed at the knob and the light flickered as a signal for him to open. There was but a single man in the control room. But one that held the destiny of the ship in his hands. He was Hgam, called by Baat, *the trusted one*. He was thick-bodied, muscular, stolid-faced. A wide grin split his lips as San swaggered through.

"Well....?" he asked.

"We go to work right now," San said. "The old fool ordered me to get the cylinders ready for tonight. Soon as darkness is complete. Before long he will make his tour of the dormitories to see if all is secure. Your men are ready, I trust?"

"As ready as they'll ever be. I'll have some of them intercept Baat and bring him here. We'll have to take care of the chief engineer so we better get to him. Baat will notify him of what he's set you to doing. He's a rough, tough man, so don't be gentle with him. I have a couple of men who can handle his details. If he makes any foolish moves kill him!"

For an instant rage burned in San's throat. Who did Hgam think he was, ordering him as he did? Then the fire cooled. Hgam could be taken care of later. The important thing was getting Baat and the engineer out of the way. 'Don't worry about the engineer and Baat. They'll be taken care of."

"I'm not worried about them," Hgam said. "I just want them out of the way. There are any number of men aboard who don't like either one of us and who might make trouble. We want a free hand right off the sleeve."

"Right! I'll go to the armory and set things in motion, then take a couple of the men with me to the engine room. I'll signal when everything is in readiness. We'll go up then...."

THE SMALL car wound its way around the curves leading to the hill. Fern Linden was driving. Sain, silent and introspective, sat beside her. Finishing their meal they had decided on the spur of the moment to take a look for themselves at Loon Lake.

"Are we close?" she asked, her eyes narrowed in careful watching of the road.

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"I—I think so—aah! There it is! Slow.... Here we are."

They moved up the long slope of the hill, his arm about her waist. Nor did she remove it or seem to mind its proximity. And once more Sain found himself surveying the placid waters of the lake. Not a ripple stirred its surface; the scene was picture-book calm. She turned her face to his and said:

"I don't know why I feel as if we were about to watch something momentous but I do. It's as if we were sudden spectators at an unveiling."

He had to smile at her odd choice of words. "Let's make ourselves comfortable at least," he said.

Sain's mouth dropped open then. He could only stare at a something which was slowly emerging from the silver water. It was black, huge, circular, yet not a ripple stirred the waters as it rose until it seemed to float at the top. It moved. Slowly, surely it moved toward the shore close to them.

"Sain!" a voice urged through the fog of his amazement. "Let's get down there for a close look!"

He turned toward the girl but she was already scrambling down the hillside toward the shelving bit of rock from which they'd fished a week before. He scrambled after her.

There were bushes along the edge and they were her goal. He joined her as she reached the first of them. But as he ran he kept one eye on the huge disk. He saw then that Sam Hendon had been right about there being ports all around the center rim, which was raised in a sort of welt all about the semi-sphere. They were made of some metal which reflected light for he could see the gleam of it from the side where the moon's rays struck.

With a suddenness which stopped them in their tracks a single narrow beam of light leaped from one of the ports on the near side and centered its light squarely on them. Sain threw caution to the winds. He grabbed her about the middle and threw her to the ground and fell upon her.

"Quick!" he breathed into her ear. "Into the bushes!"

He lifted his head just in time to see a section of the disk open, as if it were an orange being sectioned, and from it an immense portcullis affair fell. It landed soundlessly on the shore a few yards from where Sain lay. He turned his head for a quick look and breathed a quick sigh of relief at not seeing Fern. Then there came the sound of racing footsteps and he turned again toward the unearthly sphere to see a large number of tiny figures rushing toward him.

The spotlight from the depths of the ship was still turned on him. Escape seemed impossible. Setting his jaw he rose to meet the intruders. He didn't know whether Fern had escaped but he did know if he stayed and fought them for no matter how small a time, it would enable her to get further away, and possibly altogether.

The little men came but a little higher than Sain's knees, but there were so many of them. Sain didn't wait to ask their intentions. He stepped forward to meet them, his arms and legs working together in well-aimed kicks and punches. They fell and flew in all directions as his feet and fists met their tiny shapes. But they were too many and some managed to get behind him.

His rage at them blinded him to the fact that they were armed. As he fought he could hear the piping of their voices, and confused as it was, he recognized the language they used, English! Then one voice rose above

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the rest:

"Use a ray on him!"

Sain whirled intuitively just in time to see one of the tiny people raise a miniature rifle to his shoulder. Sain lunged wildly toward the tiny figure. Only to be met by a blast of flame. It was a flicker of orange several inches across, but when it met Sain's chest it struck with a physical force, knocking him to the ground.

He felt no burn, no pain, only a general numbness, as if he had been struck by a trip-hammer. Instantly the little men swarmed over him, and while some threw themselves across his arms and legs, others produced cords to bind him. Then, trussed like some strange hen, he was lifted to a group's shoulders and carried up the gangplank.

FERN SCRAMBLED up the hill side, her brain on fire. She had seen them; just as Sam had described them. And now they had Agar Sain ...The thought of him made a lump form in her throat. He had deliberately thrown his life away so that she might escape. She felt sure that he had thought out on the instant the chances of her escaping and had acted accordingly.

She lay on the crest of the hill for a moment, then turned and looked down. She was just in time to see the little men lift Sain to their shoulders. She knew then that he was alive and a pean of joy rose in her throat. Had he been dead they would have left him there. She rose to her feet and raced for the road which lead to her car.

Westhaven lay quietly in the shallow valley. The only lights showing were in Swanson's Service Station and in the office of the Sheriff. The small car turned the corner on two wheels and skidded to a halt, the front wheels smack against the curb. Fern leaped from behind the wheel and raced across the walk and flung the door open.

"Sheriff Gaines!"

A lank man in overalls and khaki shirt, his hair mussed and his eyes shadowed as if he had just awakened, came between the frame of an inside door. A gun swung low from a holster tied to his belt. Sleep fled his eyes as he saw the girl.

Miss Fern!" he exclaimed. "What's wrong?"

"Sam Hendon was right, Gaines!" she blurted out. "Sain and I just saw it! What's more, Sain was taken prisoner by those little men!"

Gaines swept a gnarled hand through his grey hair. He knew Fern Linden well, better than most, and respected her intelligence and drive. She was not like the villagers. If she said she saw this thing they had searched so fruitlessly for, then it was there.

"....Loon Lake?" he asked.

"Right. Contact that army air force field near Briscor. Have them send up a couple of planes. I'll get State police on the and tell them to meet us..."

* * *

A half dozen spotlights blazed criss-crossing paths over the surface of Loon Lake. Overhead, a number of army fighter planes buzzed their metallic call. Fern Linden, surrounded by State Police and air force officers, pointed to the spot where the huge sphere had risen from the waters. Not far off a mobile radio unit kept contact with the planes.

A sergeant came running up to the group and after saluting gave his message. The planes had found nothing although some had climbed to a forty thousand foot ceiling.

"Well, Miss Linden," a Major said, "what now? You know we can't keep doing this all day and night."

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Fern's shoulders slumped in weariness. How could she get them to believe her? Suddenly all heads lifted. A vast humming sound filled the air. And from out of the humming distinct sounds formed into words:

"...ONE OF YOU IS A PRISONER ABOARD OUR SPHERE .. DO NOT ATTEMPT FORCE .. WE WILL MAKE OUR PRESENCE KNOWN...."

SAIN SAT on the metal floor of the control room, his arms folded about his drawn up legs. Facing him were Savor San, Hgam and a half dozen of the little men of Weehen. San and Hgam were unarmed, but the others carried strange tubes in their arms. Sain was frankly curious as he looked to the thick-bodied little men.

He had been taken directly to San. The leader of the rebels ordered his bonds removed after warning Sain that it would be foolish for him to attempt force; that it would be a matter of a second for death to strike. And Sain believed the little man. Then the Earthman had been taken up to the control tower for questioning.

They had wanted to know everything about him He told them frankly. Then he had asked questions, and their answers had been to the point and direct. They were from another Universe, there were ten thousand of them, and they intended staying. Then Sain asked their intentions if interference should be attempted. Their answer drained the blood from his face.

"....We will annihilate this planet, make it a wasteland," San replied. "We will brook nothing in our way. Show him the exterior visio-screen, Hgam."

Sain was taken before a huge screen. The screen was clouded with a milky substance against which little specks moved. Sain narrowed his eyes to see better.

"Those are a number of your ships," Sain said. "They are twenty miles below us. We could shoot them from the sky quite easily."

Sain did not doubt it. "Just what do you want?" he asked.

San and Hgam smiled at each other. This giant was a simple soul. So was Baat. An idea came to San. The giant and Baat could entertain each other. He whispered his intention to Hgam and the other laughed aloud.

"Take the giant to the prison," San told the guards.

The prison proved to be a large square room barred on three sides, the fourth side a solid wall of metal. Three men sat on a bench, a bench too low for a man of Sain's size. One of the guards called to the three, saying something about more carrion... The three small men stood as Sain stepped forward, smiled, and sat on the floor. He had found it was the only way to be comfortable in these rooms made for people à third his size.

"How did San capture you?" one of them asked.

Sain related what had happened, then asked who they were. One of them was Baat, another, the chief engineer and the third, the commander of the battle forces. The chief engineer and the warrior were considerably marked on their faces as if they had put up quite a struggle before their capture.

"So San has begun his campaign of terror," Baat said reflectively. "The steps are quite easily visualized. First terror, the gas bombs, later, a few ray bursts to burn a city or two to the ground, then the paralysis capsules. He *could* overpower this planet. And only three of us...."

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"Four," Sain said."

"....Four then, who can stop him. We stand a good chance of doing it, if we can break from here. San cannot use the heavy weapons in the sphere; it would be suicide. I'm sure he has only a few warriors. But first we must contrive escape, nor have we too much time. I feel certain San is planning a quick campaign."

IT ENDED there for a while. The three Weehens went back to their bench against the wall while Sain remained on the floor, lost in thought. It was evident they had thought of escape and had given up the thought. Either this cage was escape-proof or they had not found a means. Sain could see and hear the guard pacing back and forth before the cell. And a thought came to him. It was an old contrivance writers used, to have their heroes escape sometimes. Perhaps it would work here...

He arose, his face contorted, his voice hoarse and frightened, "Help! I can't breath! This air...." He turned and stumbled toward the door but before he could quite reach it he fell flat on his face, making the fall so real he mashed his mouth and nose against the metal floor, causing blood to flow.

It was probably the blood seeping past his face that caused the guard to open the door. A faked fall would not have done so. The guard held the tube before him, menacing the others and holding them at bay while he bent to Sain.

Suddenly the Earthman's fingers swept up and pulled the guard close. One twist of Sain's wrist and the guard went limp. The others joined Sain, and the commander grabbed up the tube truimphantly. "A needle gun!"

Baat already had the keys to the cell and as he leaped for the door, he called, "The control room first. We must descend to Earth. The Earthman and Trag will get to the armory. There should be some who are not wholly with San and the others. I and Havor will go to the control room. While Havor takes over I will warn our people to stay in their dormitories. The children must not be endangered...."

Trag, who was the man in the uniform, handed the needle gun to Baat and gestured for Sain to follow him, and started at a run down the long, dimly-lit corridor. It led straight as an arrow to their goal. Sain was hard put, despite his size, to keep up with the swift-running Trag.

The armory was an immense room which took up some hundred feet of wall. There were fully a hundred men, all armed with the same queer kind of gun which had blasted Sain into helplessness, standing about. Long before they were close, Trag shouted:

"It is Trag, your commander. Capture the traitors...."

He kept repeating the cry until they were within yards of the guards. Indecision was to be seen on their faces. But as they saw it was Trag, some acted. Turning on those who were traitors, they began blasting. In an instant the whole corridor was filled with the flash of the guns. Sain, remembering the effect of being hit by the flame, flattened himself against the wall. It was over shortly. There were many more who were true to Baat than to San. The traitors were bound and laid on the floor.

"Your size makes you a good target," Trag observed as he started off at the head of his men. If we run into trouble fall to the floor. Now we go to clean up."

BAAT AND Havor were unopposed and unobserved as they made

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their way toward the control room. The space ship was silent as a tomb.

"We are hovering in mid-air," Havor observed. "Only the inertia motors keep us so. Hgam is a fool. Does he not know we will fall for a hundred miles before he can generate enough power for flight, unless he has the reserve power on? And if I know that fool, he has forgotten about it."

They did not take the elevator down but ran the five flights of stairs. They approached the control room and Havor pulled Baat close and whispered in his ear, "See! The door is ajar. Be ready to blast when I open.. "

There were four men in the room, San, Hgam, and two guards. They turned as one, their faces blanching when they saw who had burst in on them. Hgam and Sam were bent above a board on which maps had been pinned. The guards were on the other side of the room.

"Drop your weapons!" Baat commanded, sweeping the room with his needle gun.

The guards obeyed instantly.

"Now against the wall," Baat said.

As they started to move, Havor stepped forward to take the controls, and as he moved forward his body was between Baat's and Hgam's. It was then Hgam moved. Swift as light he leaped for the control panel and before Baat could fire, Hgam twisted at one of the dials. It was like being in an elevator which had lost its brakes in a descent.

* * *

AGAR SAIN felt as if the walls had suddenly contracted to embrace him. He swayed back and forth, finally managing a balance. Trag and the men of Weehen had fallen to the floor, their faces drawn in sudden fear. Their fall stopped with a jolt which shook them up.

"Quick!" Trag said, as he started off at a run. "The control room."

They were just in time. The sudden drop had caused Baat to lose the gun and the four leaped upon the two. The arrival of Trag and the others stopped the fight. Havor ran to the control board. A grim smile played on his lips as he announced.

"We have landed safely, and securely, on the bottom of the lake. What is more, we are fast...."

Only Baat got the implications. "You mean we remain here, until the oxygen tanks are empty ... and then...."

Havor threw his hands wide. But Baat was not one to give up easily. "Do we have power on the audiscope?" he asked.

The answer was in the affirmative.

"Then," said Baat, "we must call for help...."

THE FALL of the sphere from Weehen made a splash heard round the world. It took all the resources of the army and navy to bring it to the surface. Fern was the first to greet Sain as he stepped off the gangplank; she greeted him as he had hoped she would, with a kiss. Then they stepped aside to let the ten thousand people of Weehen step ashore. It was Fern who scooped the world news. The article read:

"It's happened at last. An invasion from space! The World was invaded by ten thousand people from the planet of Weehen. Ten thousand men, women and children arrived early this morning just as the sun was breaking over Loon Lake in the Berkshires. They came on a space ship, a ship which this reporter has not the knowledge to describe but which science-fiction writers have had knowledge of for years.

"They came armed with weapons superior to any we possess. A fact

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this reporter verified with army headquarters. Yet they came in peace though it remained for an Earthman to make that possible. And why did they come? To find a home. Literally. To find a place to live. Who would have thought the housing situation was not ours alone, but belonged to the Universe? We hope they will find a home among us, as others have, for the Wee Men can be the giants of our world. given the chance."

As Sain said. "It isn't the greatest writing of our age, but it's, as you say, the scoop of the age. Not that I care any more. Now that Sam is well, all I want to do is fish once more. How about that, Mrs. Sain?"

"It's all right with me, dear," Fern Sain said. "But just remember. I still have the paper. Any more invasions from space, and I want first rights to it."

"Honey," her husband said, "if Sam Hendon even mentions space ships to me, I am going to break his neck. All I want to see in Loon Lake is a trout two feet long and ten pounds in weight...."

★ FLEXIBLE RADIO TUBE ★

By SANDY MILLER

ONE OF THE outstanding features of modern civilization is the fact that measurements are used everywhere. And moreover, these measurements are, for the most part, becoming more and more electrical in nature. Even in factories and machine shops, where formerly the micrometer and the Vernier caliper ruled supreme, electrical substitutions are taking the place of those tools, and instruments.

The main reason for this is due to the fact that electrical measurements are relatively easy to take and comparitively easy to read. Anyone can read a dial or a meter. It's simple and direct.

Evidently then the problem boils down basically to this; if you have something to measure, be it a force, or the height of a liquid or a temperature, or a length, convert it to a voltage or a current and then measure it with an electric voltmeter or an ammeter. In many cases this is extremely easy. For example to measure temperature all we have to do is hook up a thermocouple to a meter. The thermocouple provides a voltage proportional to the temperature it is at.

Forces and displacements are another thing. It is true that if you squeeze a quartz crystal you get a voltage—but the whole setup is fragile and unsuitable. Ordinary phonograph pickups of various varieties are fine examples of displacement measurers. Recently, a new gadget has been invented which helps in many fields, including sound equipment.

A small radio tube, a triode has been manufactured. It is much like ordinary tubes consisting of a filament, grid and plate. Ordinarily a voltage is applied to the grid and this causes variations in the current from plate to cathode, the basic principle of the amplifier.

In the new tube, however, the grid is connected to an arm flexibly protruding through the top of the tube Bend the projection, or strain it a little and you have a mechanical control of the electron stream from cathode to plate—presto! Use it in a phonograph, use it on a lather, use it wherever you want to translate motion into electrical quantities, and your problem is solved.

While such inventions in themselves do not seem very profound or significant, it must be realized that the sum total of them —vast as it is—changes in the long run, the whole picture of life. The process is accelerating and we are reaching the point where living is really complex. How many homes do you know of which are not mazes of wiring, electric motors, lights, tubes etc? Very few, indeed.

With the advent of television, the fact is expanding. Soon, it will require a scientist just to *live* in a home. But fortunately things are not really as bad as that. Along with the complications comes another saving grace—reliability.

It is a never ending source of wonder to the editors of this magazine that in the United States we can go into any town anywhere and buy a quarter horsepower electric motor for about ten dollars. In the rest of the world, with few exceptions it is worth your life to get an electric light bulb! When Irving Berlin wrote "God Bless America" he knew what he was doing!

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QUEST FOR GOLD

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

IN 1849 GOLD was discovered in California, and the gold rush was on. Men beat a path westward in search of the precious metal, and nothing seemed more important to any men of that date.

The significant fact is that times have never changed. Throughout the ages the one thing that would bring a wild light to a man's eye was the mention of the word gold, and where it could be found.

Archaeologists have found numerous golden relics deep beneath the foundations of buildings that date from the 1st dynasty of Ur. This is a mute testimony to man's agelong quest for the precious metal.

But probably the most fertile ground for the study of man's early quest for gold lies in Ireland. The greatest number of golden relics unearthed by modern scientists has been in that country. Careful study of the items has revealed that they were probably made during the fabulous bronze era, and since golden relics of an unmistakably Irish stamp have been found in other portions of the world, it can be safely assumed that Ireland did a thriving business in its early days.

What then of future man? We can only fictionalize and project ourselves into a later era, say at a time when atomic wars have wiped out our modern civilization. After many centuries elapse we can visualize a party of scientists unearthing a great cache of gold in the area that had once been known as Kentucky. What would they think upon discovering this great gold hoard deep in the ground? That's a question we cannot answer. But one thing we can feel certain of, the same thrill would possess them that possessed ancient man when he discovered gold, and the same thrill that possesses modern man today.

Result? The quest goes on. And it probably will go on as long as man inhabits this planet.

RUBBER HORSE

By WILLIAM KARNEY

IT WOULD be a pretty safe bet to predict that nothing will replace the railroads, at least for a long time to come, as movers of the greatest and heaviest quantities. When it is realized that the railroads move most of the six hundred millions of tons of coal mined every year in the U. S., a measure of the importance and ability of this basic transportation system is seen.

In the last twenty years, trucks, long distance hauler-trailer combinations have taken a lot of business away from the railroads, but this is mostly because of the necessity of speed. When it comes to moving lots of stuff in a reasonable amount of time, neither the aircraft nor the truck can replace the Iron Horse or the Diesel engine.

But science-fiction has called the turn even on this one, for there is a potential threat to the railroads, a threat predicted long ago—the moving conveyor belt! S-f applied its guess of the future primarily to the moving of passengers—but now a proposed system has been designed to carry of all things—coal and iron ore! In the Pennsylvania-Ohio combine, "the miniature Ruhr", moving ore and coal has become a big problem. The construction of a specific railroad is both difficult and costly. Engineers have come up with the idea of using a series of endless belts ensconced in a covering tube.

The construction of the project is expensive and difficult, but it provides a speedy capacious system which even the big haulers of the railroads can't compete with.

Generally speaking the use of these conveyor belts is ncreasing all over the country. There are many places where installations up to a mile or more in length have been made, and these belts haul everything from rock to coal to ores of all varieties.

The stress on industrial inventions which the editors of this magazine have been pushing is a logic result. We realize that the great power of the United States depends on its scientific progress....nowadays above all. But scientific progress sooner or later manifests itself in the form of industrial inventions useful and constructive in a million ways.

Even now, theoretical atomic power is on its way to becoming a practical utilitarian instrument to be handed to the engineer to generate more electric power which is so vitally needed. The congestion of traffic in our major cities is giving rise to revived proposals of the conveyor belt system for passengers. The "moving sidewalk" idea is old stuff to science fictionists. And we suggest that nobody stop thinking of either inventions or gadgets until everybody has everything he wants—a situation not impossible to realize—American technology, business sense and industriousness is going to make this come true.

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The WHEEL FROM SPACE

By E. K. JARVIS

It was an odd little wheel, running without any apparent source of power. And Jeff knew that he had to solve its secret.

HE LOCKED the door behind us, pulled down the blinds and turned on a single shaded lamp over the workbench. Then he started toward the safe but changed his mind and went quickly to the corridor door instead, unlocked and opened it and loked out into the hallway. It was past ten o'clock and the physics building ws empty. The students, even Professor Pudge, were gone. he listened for a moment at the open door, then closed and locked it.

"What makes, Johnny?" I asked.

He grunted but did not answer. I didn't press him. Johnny Mason was my friend. If he wanted to act like he was one of the cloak and dagger boys it was all right with me. I knew him as one of the most brilliant graduate students on the campus. While I watched, he turned again toward the safe.

The safe, a big iron-banded affair that the physics department had bought to store uranium and various radioactive isotopes where they wouldn't fall into what Professor Pudge called the "coltish hands of damnfool college students", was under the workbench. Johnny spun the dial and opened it, then cocked his head to one side and listened.

I didn't have the ghost of an idea of what he was doing. I had been in my room boning up for a physics quiz, when he came after me, saying he had something he wanted to show me. He had been worried, fretful, preoccupied when he came to my room. Watching him listen at the open door of the safe, I could see he was still worried, fretful, and preoccupied with some problem that was maybe a little too big for even his keen brain to handle.

"You act like you're afraid a skeleton will jump out of that safe and snap its teeth at you," I said.

He glanced over his shoulder at me. "I wish to hell a skeleton would jump out. I would like it a lot better than—" He reached inside the safe and carefully lifted out a metal box about eight inches long and six inches high. Setting it on the workbench under the light, he opened the lid and removed something from inside the box. "Look at this, Jeff."

I looked. His manner had led me to expect anything, from the Kohinoor diamond to a drunken elf singing, "Shut the door, Jefferson."

IT WASN'T a diamond or a chunk of radium, or even a drunken gremlin. Just a little wheel about three inches in diameter. The axle resting on a home-made cradle, the wheel was spinning. It wasn't con-

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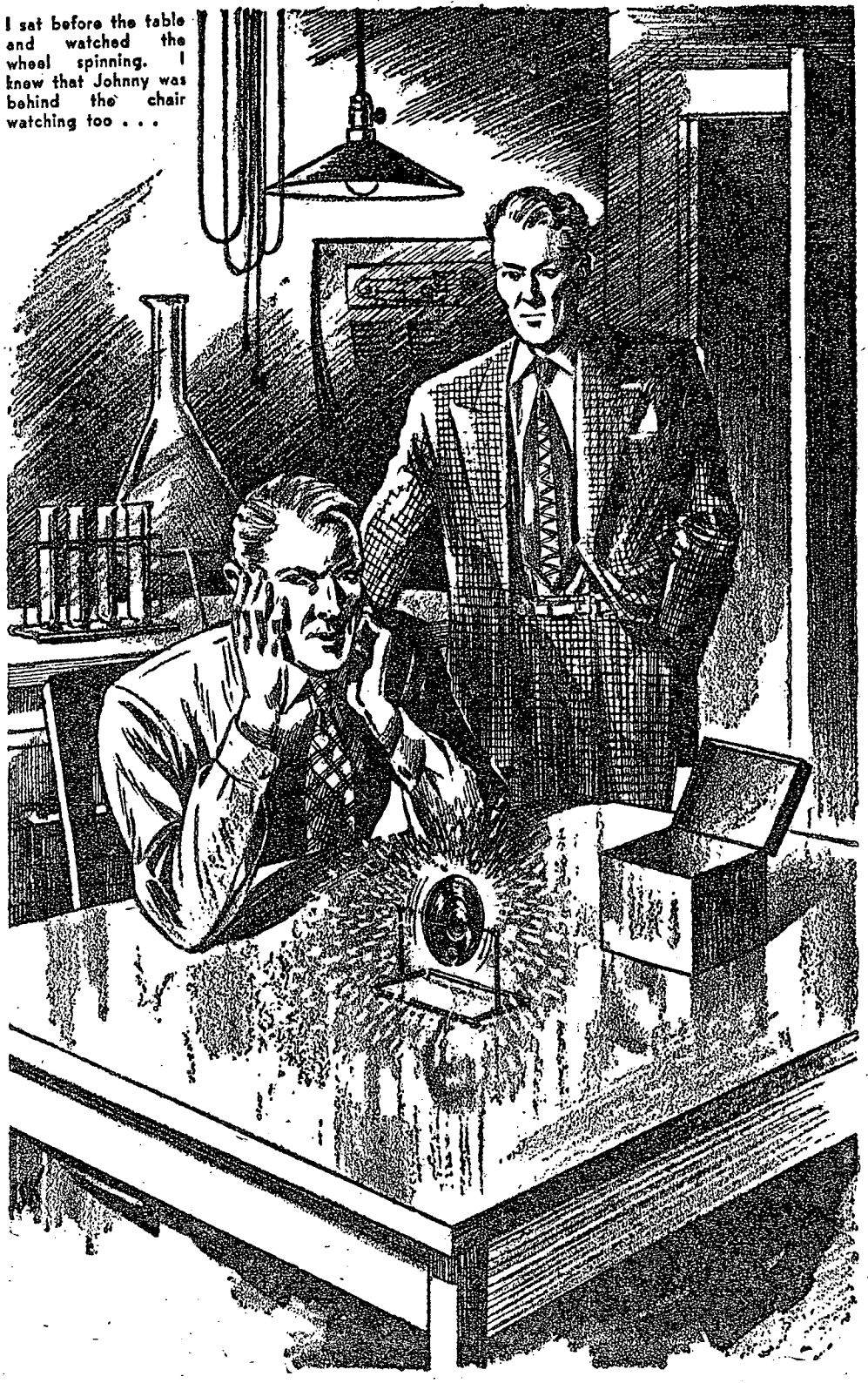
I sat before the table and watched the wheel spinning. I knew that Johnny was behind the chair watching too . . .



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nected to any power source that I could see, but it was turning as smoothly and as regularly as it would have turned if it had all the power on earth to draw on. Obviously it had been taken from some piece of equipment. It wasn't much to look at, certainly, as far as I could see, it was not important enough to justify Johnny's cloak and dagger actions.

My face must have reflected my thinking. Johnny said, "To my knowledge, it hasn't stopped turning in the past thirty-six hours."

"Um. Where is it getting its power?"

He looked unhappy. "I don't know, Jeff. That's the catch. It doesn't have a source of power. But it turns."

"It can't," I protested. "Friction would stop it."

"It doesn't," he answered.

"Don't tell me this is perpetual motion!"

His unhappiness increased. "I'd like to call it that but I know it isn't. The truth is, I don't know why it turns."

I lit a cigarette. "Where'd you get it?

"I stole it," he answered.

I let tobacco smoke seep into my lungs while I considered his answer. "Where'd you steal it?"

"From a hill-billy down in Arkansas," he answered.

I groaned. This got madder and madder. Johnny had stolen a wheel that turned forever from an Arkansas hill-billy. I was expecting the March hare to pop out of the wainscoating at any minute. "There was a story in the paper a few days ago," Johnny went on. "About a mountaineer who had found a wheel that turned with no apparent power source. I read the story and went down there to see for myself. The hill-billy wouldn't sell it. So I stole it and left two hundred dollars in place of it. I imagine he's satisfied. Damn it, Jeff, I *had* to have this wheel. He didn't know what it was—"

"Do you?"

"No. I know it is part of some machine but that's all I know."

"Where'd the hill-billy get it?"

"He found it."

"Under a cabbage leaf?"

He frowned at me for trying to be facetious. "He said it fell from the sky in a chunk of ice. He said he saw it fall."

I groaned. Bring on all your March hares and your Alices and your happy, happy wonderlands. "Rain falling from the sky, I will believe. Sleet, snow hair, meteorites. The Kaaba Manna. Fish and frogs and snakes and gollywhoppers. I will believe all these things have fallen from the sky. But—"

"The mountaineer was telling the truth. I talked to him. He was scared but he stuck to his story. He swore he saw a chunk of ice fall from the sky and that this wheel was in it. And I believe him."

"I suppose you also believe somebody dropped it!" I said grimly.

He nodded. "Somebody or *something*!"

I WISHED I had kept my big mouth shut. Johnny Mason was miserable. He knew I was thinking he was nuts and he didn't want me to think that, mostly I suppose because he was thinking it himself. I took a firm grip on my runaway emotions. "Maybe it fell from a plane."

"No," he said. "The wheel must have fallen at least a hundred miles. Otherwise it wouldn't have got cold enough to have served as a nucleus for the formation of ice when it passed through the atmosphere."

"Meteorites don't form ice," I protested.

"They are traveling so fast that they burn from friction when they hit earth's air blanket. An object such as this wheel will reach terminal velocity at a speed of a few hundred

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miles per hour, which is too slow for frictional heating passage through the air. It remained cold and instead of burning like a meteor, it became coated with ice. To become that cold, it must have fallen from a great height, a hundred miles at least. Therefore it didn't fall from any plane with conventional motors because such planes don't fly that high.'

His reasoning was sound enough as far as it went. "What about a plane with jet or rocket motors?"

"It might have come from such a ship," he agreed. "But I don't think it did." He pointed to it. "It turns and keeps on turning. To the best of my knowledge, there is no science on earth capable of producing a wheel that continues to turn when separated from its power source. Which leads to the conclusion that it wasn't made on this planet."

He shivered and I choked over a mouthful of cigarette smoke. This conclusion had been there all the time but I had been shying away from it. "Then you think we've got sky visitors?" I asked.

He looked both scared and pleased. There was fright on his face but there was eagerness too and I realized he wanted to believe we had visitors from the sky. I could see the conflict in him, the fear, because sky visitors might not be friendly, and the eagerness, because such visitors would have at their command a science far in advance of anything known on earth. Johnny Mason wanted to get his fingers on some of that science. He itched to do it. It meant more to him than life itself. But I knew him well enough to know that he didn't want the science of possible sky visitors for his own gain, for money, for glory, or for fame, but because there was in him the same flame that has burned in all great scientists, the urge to know. In comparison to that urge nothing else is important, not even life itself. But he was scared just the same.

"I think they've come," he whispered, his face glowing. "I think they've finally come." He spoke as if he had been expecting this to happen every day of his life. "I think—"

He broke off. From somewhere in the building came the sound of an opening door. "Jeff!" His whisper was an agonized sound. "I think I've been followed. I haven't had a chance to tell you about it—"

"Take the wheel and get out the side door. I'll meet you in your room." He put the wheel back inside the box and I shoved him toward the door. "What about you?" he protested.

"I'll go see who came in," I answered. "Probably it was only Professor Pudge, sneaking back here where it's quiet to think up some brain-twisting questions for his quiz tomorrow. But I'll go see. Get along, Johnny."

CLUTCHING the box, he went out the side door. I went to the other door and listened. Somebody was moving in the corridor. I could hear him out there. I turned off the light and went out, wondering if here went nothing.

A man was standing under the ceiling light. Cupped in his hands, he was studying a small instrument that looked, from the glimpse I got of it, like an exposure meter used to register light intensity. Hearing me open the door, he straightened up and looked at me.

At first glance I didn't know him. He studied me for a moment.

"Looking for someone?" I said.

Under the dim light, his face seemed to blur a little. Then it was strong and firm, the face of Professor Pudge. I exhaled in a sigh. "Good evening, Professor."

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Nobody else on earth had a face like that, a face that looked like it had started off intending to fit on a horse, then had changed its mind and had decided to belong to a man. He looked me over. "Ah," he said. "Good evening, Mr. Dryson."

He waited for me to speak again but I didn't know what to say so I mumbled something about coming down to the lab to bone up for his quiz and brushed past him and went out the front door. Looking back through the glass, I saw he was watching me. I looked around for Johnny but he had apparently taken air. I headed across the campus toward his rooming house.

I admit I had been scared and I felt shaky now. I also felt a little like a fool. Walking across the campus, the feeling grew. It was a calm and ordered scene around me, the gray stone buildings of the University gleaming dull white in the moon-lit night, a soft night wind blowing through the trees. From a bench in a dark nook, a girl laughed. Across the campus, toward fraternity row, I heard a burst of hot music. Sky visitors! Feeling more like a fool who has been tricked by his own imagination, I saw a tall, gaunt man striding along the walk toward me.

I scarcely glanced at him until he nodded to me and spoke. "Good evening, Mr. Dryson."

I almost fell flat on my face gawking at him. It was Professor Pudge!

"Professor! How did you get here. I saw you in the physics building—"

"You saw me? Nonsense, Mr. Dryson. I am on my way there now, to pick up some papers I overlooked this afternoon."

"But—" My teeth were chattering. I could hear them.

"Have you been drinking, Mr. Dryson?"

I grabbed his arm. The flesh was firm under my grip. "I just saw you. I swear it."

He shook off my hand. "Nonsense, Mr. Dryson. The only possible explanation for your conduct is that you have been drinking. I trust it will not interfere with your performance on my test tomorrow morning."

The last sentence was delivered over his shoulder, in a stuffy, irritated, threatening tone of voice. I had heard that tone of voice too often—commenting on the imbecility of college students in general and graduate students in particular, to mistake it. That was Professor Pudge all right. And that was Professor Pudge striding away from me in his usual stage of high dudgeon.

This being Professor Pudge, who the hell had I seen in the physics building?

I went across the campus on a dead run, heading for Johnny Mason's room.

His door was locked. I pounded on it. "Who is it?" he called.

"Me," I said. He admitted me and took one look at my face. "Jeff! What's wrong?"

I TRIED to tell him what had happened. He took a second look at me and went quickly to his trunk and took out a bottle of bourbon. Going down my throat, the stuff tasted like so much water.

"The man you saw in the physics building was using something that looked like an exposure meter?" Johnny questioned. I nodded. "I was afraid of that," he went on. "That was a detector, of some kind, and he was using it to trace this." He nodded toward the box sitting on his study table.

"But how the hell—"

"I don't know how. But the men who could make a wheel like this could also make a device to trace and

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detect that wheel if it became lost."

I reached for the bourbon again and looked beyond it through the open window. We were on the second floor. On the sidewalk below, in the bright moonlight, I could see a man walking. He was studying something he held in his hand. "Johnny!" I whispered. He quickly turned out the light. We stood in the window watching.

As though he was suddenly aware of us, the man looked up toward the window. I could sense his gaze on me. "Is that the man?" Johnny asked.

"I don't know," I answered, uncomfortably. "For a moment I thought it looked like Bill Herman."

The man stepped into the shadow of a tree, then came out again. He was still looking up. His face was clear in the moonlight. And I recognized him. "It *is* Bill Herman," I said. Herman was a second-string tackle on the football team and an undergraduate engineering student.

"Are you sure?" Johnny questioned.

I was sure. I felt that way. To prove I was right, I leaned out the window and called out, "Hi, Bill."

Herman, slipping something into his pocket, answered, "Hello. Is that you, Jeff?"

"Uh-huh."

"I want to see you a moment. May I come up?" He spoke slowly, enunciating each word carefully.

"He wants to come up," I said to Johnny. "Okay?"

"I guess so," he answered uneasily. Leaning out the window, I told Herman to come on up. He was a good joe, maybe a little thick between the ears to make a good engineering student, but reliable. Johnny took the box containing the wheel from his study table and hid it in his trunk before we heard Herman's feet on the stairs. Johnny turned the lights on and unlocked the door. Bill Herman entered. He stood in the doorway, blinking at me. I was sure I knew him. But Johnny looked at him and cried out and backed away. "Jeff! That's—"

His face was paper white. Herman looked at him, taking his eyes off me as he did so, and my heart jumped up inside my throat and threatened to choke me.

I can't blame myself for making the mistake. I just didn't know that things like this could happen and I didn't know what to guard against. I certainly thought this was Bill Herman and I kept right on thinking it until he took his eyes off me and looked at Johnny Mason. Then, before my eyes, he changed. His round, good-natured face sharpened. His nose changed from snub to Roman. His cheeks tanned a deeper brown. The hairline went higher, revealing a high, sloping forehead. The face changed, became sharper, keener, more intelligent, with wary alert eyes.

I knew then that this man had made me *think* he was Bill Herman just as the man in the laboratory—or was this the same man?—had made me think he was Professor Pudge.

I YELLED something, I don't know what. At the sound, the man's gaze swung back to me. I could see concentration tighten the lines around his eyes. Again he became—Bill Herman.

Johnny yelled. The man looked from me to him. As he looked away from me, I saw he wasn't Herman. Irritation crossed his face. "The devil!" I seemed to hear him say, and as I seemed to hear him I knew my mind was picking up a thought impression and translating it into words I would have used in his place. "I can't control both of you at the same time. Damn!"

He reached into his pocket.

I stepped forward and hit him un-

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der the ear. The blow knocked him clear across the room. He fell across the top of Johnny's bed and landed against the wall. I started after him.

He was one of the fastest-moving men I ever saw. He had just taken a lick on the ear that had knocked him sprawling but that didn't interfere with his speed. His right hand went into his pocket like chain lightning flashing across a greased sky. It came out with a gadget that looked like a hand-powered flashlight. Only this wasn't a flashlight and I knew it. Exactly what it was I didn't want to discover. When it was pointed at me, I stopped and lifted my hands.

I could see the man behind the weapon now. He wasn't Bill Herman or Professor Pudge. The hypnosis, or whatever it was he had used to make me think he was somebody else, was broken and gone. He was wearing a close-fitting gray uniform, with an insignia of rank on the collar, and a tight helmet.

He got to his feet. "So there won't be any further ill-advised attempts—" The thought was clear enough but I realized now that he hadn't spoken, that I had actually caught a thought impression in my mind. He looked around the room, his gaze finally centering on the bottle of bourbon sitting on the study table. He pointed the weapon at the bottle.

Nothing passed between the gun and the whiskey. There was no sound, no flare of light, but the bottle flew into bits of glass finer than flour. There wasn't much of an explosion—just a soft *plop*—but the bottle was gone. I felt stinging sensations all over my body as if microscopic pieces of glass had been blown into my skin. There was a film of moisture over the walls and ceiling and a mist in the room. I ran my tongue around my lips, and got the faint taste of whiskey.

The man's eyes went to Johnny. "Where is it?"

"Where is what?" Johnny answered, as if he didn't know what the man was talking about.

"The *drone stem*—" I got a confused image of meaningless sound but the picture that came into my mind was a compass needle, which made no sense at all at the time.

Johnny shook his head. He knew he was being asked about the wheel but he had no intention of revealing where it was hidden. That wheel fascinated him. He wanted to know what it was and how it worked. He would chew on a problem like that for years, for the rest of his life.

"Very well." The man reached into another pocket, took out the gadget that looked like an exposure meter. Holding it in one hand, he watched the quivering needle it contained. Then he started straight toward the trunk. Johnny started toward him.

I grabbed Johnny. I had seen enough of the powers leashed in the weapon he had to take any chances with it or to let Johnny take any. I held him away while the man opened the trunk, glanced inside, lifted out the tray. Next came a bunch of dirty shirts, then the box. He opened it, looked inside. An expression of tremendous relief appeared on his face "It's working perfectly!" the words came into my mind. "I had been so afraid it would be damaged."

WHATEVER that wheel was, it meant an awful lot to him. It meant a lot to Johnny Mason too. I could hear him breathing hard, like he was trying to make up his mind to snatch the wheel from the man's hand. The little weapon came up. "I would regret it very much," the thought came. "But if you try to interfere with me now, I will certainly kill you."

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He meant it. The wheel was so important to him that he would eliminate instantly anybody who tried to take it away from him.

"Who are you?" Johnny whispered. "What are you? Why do you want that wheel?"

The man thought before he answered. "If you want a name for me, you can call me Arvan," he said at last. "I am Chief of Psychology of the 841st Instar Interstellar Expedition."

Maybe Chief of Psychology wasn't his right title, maybe Leader of Thought Processes was nearer, but my mind translated his answer as Chief of Psychology. He was a big shot in his field. That much was clear.

It was also clear that he was Johnny's yearned-for sky visitor. Now that he was here, I wasn't doing much yearning for him. But Johnny was yearning, for information, and stubbornly demanding it. "Why do you want that wheel?" he repeated.

Arvan studied us, thoughtfully and carefully, and I had the impression he was trying to read my mind. The Chief of Psychology of a race that had achieved space flight might be able to do that. Or try to do it! As I felt vague thoughts probing through my mind, I closed up tight and thought about nothing but the test Professor Pudge was giving the next day.

Oddly, he seemed to respect my resistance. "Very good," he said. "You have understood what I am trying to do and are resisting me. I had not thought to find the inhabitants of this planet capable of knowing what I was doing or attempting resistance. Well, we will see how well you can do it."

His gaze concentrated on me. I could feel him telling me to think about the land I lived in, the number of people who inhabited it, and the extent of the science of my world. Hell, I knew what he was doing now. I clung grimly to the thought of Professor Pudge and his high dudgeon and his freely-expressed opinion that all college students were fools. Arvan tried harder. I felt sweat pop out on my face but I stuck to Professor Pudge.

Arvan's respect grew. Amazement was mingled with it. He turned quickly to Johnny. "Control your mind!" I whispered.

"He'll get nothing from me unless he talks first!" Johnny answered.

Arvan didn't get anything from Johnny. Johnny didn't look in the other direction either. He looked the sky man straight in the eye and didn't give an inch. It was Arvan who gave up. He shrugged and looked away.

Johnny and I had beaten him in his own field but I had the impression it would have been better for us if we had lost. "There are other ways—" his thought came into mind.

He moved around the room, studying the books on the table, leafing rapidly through them. The words must have been meaningless to him but the pictures were revealing, especially the pictures and diagrams in the physics text. So were the books on mathematics. He leafed through Johnny's calculus texts, turned to a book on the atom bomb. How much he got from it, I don't know, but he must have gotten something. As he studied it, his face darkened. "Your race is advancing very rapidly," he said.

"What do you want with that wheel?" Johnny Mason said.

ARVAN didn't answer the question. He studied us again, thoughtfully, the little weapon held carelessly in one hand, and I could see him making up his mind. I could feel sweat on my face again and on the palms of my hands.

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He made up his mind. And gestured toward the door. "Walk ahead of me," he said.

"Like hell—" Johnny began.

"If I leave you here, you will certainly try to follow me," Arvan explained. "You are stubborn, you don't quit, and you are very curious. So I can be certain you will try to follow me. And since you now know I can make you think I am someone else, I could not deceive you that way again. For all I know, you might bring hundreds of your kind to hunt me down. A few I could overcome, or evade. But hundreds—" He shrugged. "Besides, I know too little about your weapons to take the chance on leaving you behind. Higher authority than I must settle the matter. So—walk ahead of me."

We hesitated. In the back of my mind was the vague thought that I might slug him again, harder this time.

His face grew grim. "I will regret it but I will leave you here, if it is necessary, as spattered bits of bloody flesh clinging to the walls and ceiling."

He meant it.

We walked ahead of him. Out of Johnny's rooming house, out into the night. We crossed the campus again. Professor Pudge, his task at the physics building apparently finished, was coming across the campus too. I saw him, wondered if I dared call to him, but caught Arvan's warning thought behind me. We let Pudge walk on. He looked at us and grunted, disdainfully.

I wonder if Pudge ever knew how close he came to getting killed that night. Certainly, if we had called to him, or tried to attract his attention, Arvan would have killed us, and him too. In a way, we saved Pudge's life, by keeping silent.

Arvan walked us out of town. I expected him to have a car somewhere but the second the idea came, I knew it was foolish. Whatever a sky man might have, he wouldn't have an automobile. The sidewalks ended, the houses thinned out, and we were walking down a country road.

We reached a line of hills. Here Arvan made us turn off the road and follow a path that led up a brushy ravine. At the head of the ravine was a grove of tall hickory trees.

Dry leaves rattled under our feet as we walked. A sleepy cow turned a placid white face toward us. It was in my mind that Arvan was taking us a long way to kill us. I glanced back over my shoulder at him. I had done this many times. Each time the gun had been ready and he had been hugging the box. The gun was still ready and he was still hugging that box.

The wheel it contained was tremendously precious to him. Again I wondered why.

Arvan must have given a signal of some kind, though I didn't hear it. Nor did I see the flier until I almost bumped into it. A dark object about thirty feet long loomed in front of me. It was shaped like a big football. Then I realized this football was actually a ship. A door opened and a face looked out at us.

"Enter," Arvan spoke.

Two sky people clad in gray uniforms stepped to one side as we ducked our heads and squeezed through the port. Arvan spoke to them, a jumble of sound that made no sense to me. They quickly closed the lock. Arvan opened a wall safe and very tenderly placed the box inside it. The two crewmen went forward to the control room. Arvan motioned for us to sit down. As we obeyed him, I felt the ship begin to move.

Acceleration practically knocked me into an upholstered lounge in the

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cabin. I don't know how many G's hit us, but it was plenty. Arvan, seated across from us, seemed accustomed to the acceleration but he noticed our distress and called out an order to the control room. The ship slowed and we breathed again. An hour later Arvan slid aside a panel that concealed a view port. He gestured to us to look out.

BELOW us, a gigantic silver ball in the moonlight, was our planet. I could see the polar ice caps, the slight flattening at the north pole, the snow capped mountains, a breath-takingly beautiful sight.

We were out of the atmosphere and still rising. Arvan was looking ahead as if he was trying to see something. Finally he pointed for us to look.

Off there in space, darkening the nearer stars, was a vast bulk, a space liner. A huge vessel! Bigger than two Queen Marys. We stared at it and I heard Johnny catch his breath at the sight. It seemed to hang motionless in space but was growing in size. From this I judged our little flier was approaching it.

"We're on an orbit around your planet," Arvan said. "An orbit saves power. And we don't have any power to waste if we are to return home again."

"Where is home?" Johnny Mason questioned.

Arvan gestured toward the black void of space. "Off there," he said. "A planet circling a star eight hundred units away."

My mind refused to accept any meaning for the term *unit*. Maybe it was a light year, maybe it was some other distance. His thought conveyed the impression that their home planet was very far away.

Johnny Mason stared at him, his mouth open.

"You have questions?" Arvan said.

"Millions of them!" Johnny blurted out. "Most of all why that wheel is so important to you. It must have fallen on earth and you must have been sent there to recover it. You must have traced it—"

"That is right," Arvan said.

"And most of all—"

"—Most of all, what are you going to do with us?" I interrupted. To me, at least this was important, though, come to think of it, I don't know exactly why.

"Our commander will decide what to do with you," Arvan answered. "As to the importance of the wheel, he will decide whether or not you can be told."

Our little flier slowed and signaled. A lock opened in the vast space liner. Our ship was gulped up like a sardine going down the gullet of a whale.

Arvan took the box from the wall safe. "You will wait here," he said. "I will return later."

Johnny would have followed him but the two crewmen came in from the control room and Arvan gave them an order. They remained, as guards. Arvan, carrying the box as carefully as he would have done if it had contained diamonds, opened the lock and vanished.

For hours, we sat there and sweated. I was thinking about me, wondering what the hell was going to happen. But I was also excited about this ship and these people. Johnny Mason almost went nuts. He wanted to know about this ship and about the race that had made a vessel capable of flying the distances between the stars. These questions were of vital importance to him, more important than his life, I guess. He was a true scientist. He didn't give a damn what happened to Johnny Mason. He just wanted to know how and why it happened I think if some unfortunate

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set of circumstances should put him in front of a firing squad, his biggest interest would be in the operating mechanism of the rifles that killed him. Then the port opened. Arvan entered.

He spoke to the two crewmen who had been guarding us and they went forward to the control room. He looked at us. I thought he smiled.

"What—" Johnny began.

ARVAN held up his hand. "The commander has decided. You are to be returned to your own planet."

"Eh?" I gulped. "That's fine. That's wonderful." Sweat popped out on me as the nervous tension broke. We were going back home!

Arvan glanced at Johnny. "You both did very well, but you can thank him, really, because both of you are going home alive."

"What?"

"While you were here, you were under careful observation. Here on this ship we have equipment that enables us to do a real job of mind reading. You, Jeff, were scared to death. Because of that, you were beginning to hate us. But Johnny here—" The smile appeared again on his face, "—was completely wrapped up in the questions he wanted to ask. He completely forgot himself and the danger he was in. His only concern was for gaining knowledge. That is an attitude that we, as the official policy of the race, will foster all we can. Races who seek knowledge, for the sake of knowledge, are under our protection, no matter where they live. As soon as we find them, learn about them, we will help them. This expedition was organized for the express purpose of helping another race."

I gulped again.

Johnny didn't seem surprised by what Arvan was saying. He had taken it for granted that this was the way it would be. He had been scared, of course, at the beginning, but he had lost all his fear. He believed with all his heart that a race that could produce interstellar liners would have keen ideas of justice. He trusted that justice.

"I still want to know about that wheel," he said.

Arvan's smile broadened. As we began to feel acceleration again, and knew that the flier was moving, he told us—about the wheel.

"That *drone stem* is part—the vital part—of a space compass. It is energized and driven by transmitted power that originates on our home planet. As long as it turns, it tells us exactly where we are in space and what line to follow to return home. Without it—" he shrugged.

"Without it, we do not have sufficient fuel to return home. Without it we are lost in space, doomed."

I nodded. This, I understood. It was something like a gyro compass. The spinning wheel was a vital part of the compass mechanism.

"But—" Johnny was full to the brim with questions. "How did it get to earth?"

Arvan sighed. "Somehow a meteor got through our screens and exploded inside the control room. A hole was blown in the wall of the hull and the space compass shattered. We could repair the hole in the hull and rebuild every part of that compass except the *drone stem*, except the heart of it. The wheel has to be energized and tuned in the transmitters at home. The wheel was lost, blown out of the ship. We followed the line of its flight and determined it had landed on your planet. While our big ship was put in an orbit around your planet, I went to look for the wheel. I was sent to find it because I have some ability in reading and controlling primitive minds." He grinned a

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little here as though to admit he had not quite controlled us the way he had wanted to.

"We had to have the wheel. Without it, we didn't have enough fuel to return home."

But didn't you carry a spare wheel?" Johnny questioned.

"Two of them," Arvan answered. "This was the last one."

THE SUN was rising when we landed again in the hickory grove. From the lock, Arvan grinned at us as we stepped out. "We will come again," he said. "Now that we know there is life on your planet, we will visit you. It may be years before we return, but we will come back, Goodbye, now."

The grin was the last I saw of him. The lock closed and the little ship shot upward through the gray light of dawn. It went out of sight. But somewhere in the grayness above us, we knew it was keeping a rendezvous with a mighty space liner.

Johnny Mason's face had a saint-like ecstacy on it. "Did you hear what he said, Jeff?" he whispered. "He said he would come back. *He'll be back Jeff!*"

"And you will have a chance to ask the rest of your questions," I answered. This was still the only thing that mattered to him. I could see plenty of complications that might result from Arvan's return but Johnny swept them aside as of no importance. All he could see was the fact that now we knew we had neighbors in space, wise neighbors, and that they had promised to visit us.

As we walked down the hill, his head was up, his eyes were on the gray mist in the heavens above—as though he was already living in that future time when Arvan and the sky people would return.

Well, we know they're coming someday. But the fact was of little immediate comfort to me. I got back to the University too late to make Professor Pudge's quiz that morning. Later, I went in and asked him for permission to take a make-up exam. Of course I had more sense that to try to tell him *why* I had missed the quiz and if I had tried, he would have had more sense than to believe me. He would have been sure then that I had been drunk the night before. He thought it anyhow. So he refused me permission to take the make-up quiz. And flunked me.

Some day, when Arvan returns, I'm going to get him to give me some private tutoring, then I'm going in and teach Professor Pudge something about physics that he never heard of.....

THE END

THE TOMB RIDDLE

By H. R. STANTON

OUR MODERN science today has been pondering a question that thus far has not been answered satisfactorily to any great degree. It is simply; How did prehistoric man construct the tombs he built for his dead?

The reason for the question is simple when we understand the nature of the tomb ancient man utilized for burial purposes. In its simplest form it was a huge slab of rock, weighing in most cases many tons, supported on three or more uprights. It looks simple, and indeed, by our modern standards it is. But *how* did the ancient man move these great slabs into position? We know he did not have a block and tackle or a hydraulic jack. And the use of a lever seems somewhat far-fetched for the amount of work involved. Will we ever know the answer? When we do we'll certainly know a lot more about man's rise from the primeval state! Like the comparatively modern Sphinx, the prehistoric tomb is one of science's great riddles.

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Demonstration Flight

By WARREN KASTEL

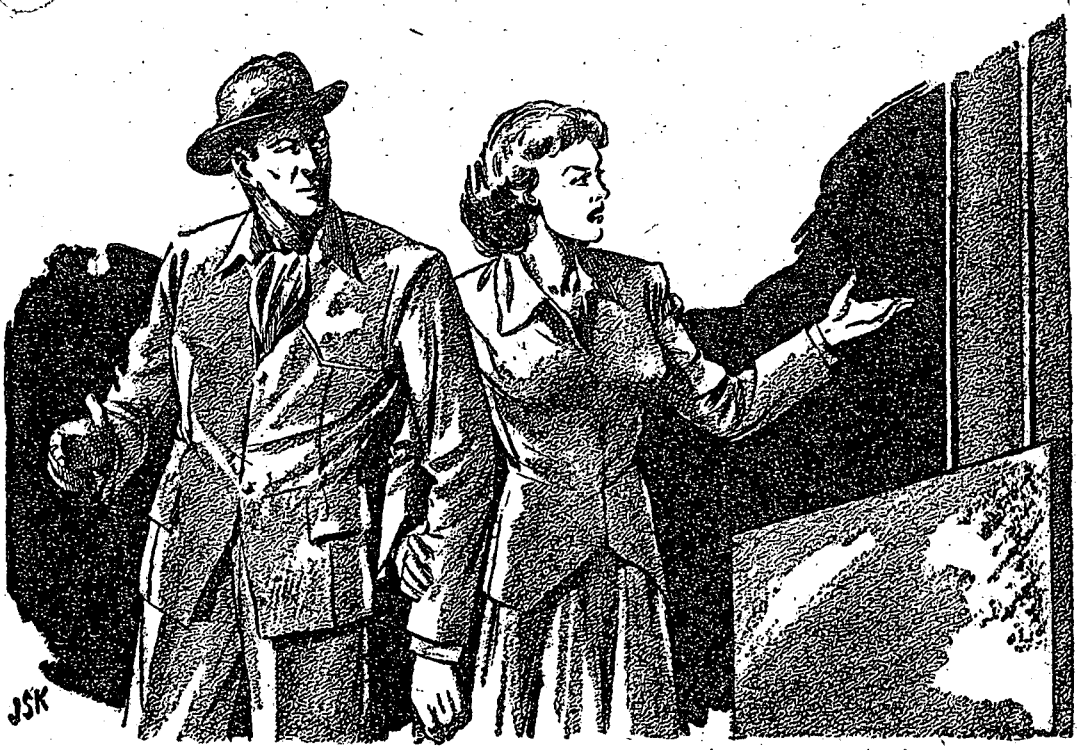
It was all part of the sales talk — taking the customer up on a demonstration flight. But this time something happened!

BEYOND the huge show window was a glittering and impressive display of latest model Verdman Skycars. In all sizes, shapes and colors, the craft stood in neat rows over the floor of the vast salesroom. Brilliant posters and banners proclaimed them "The Sweetest Things on Wings."

His nose pressed flat against the window, Gil Barclay was peering into the salesroom. But he wasn't interested in the skycars or the advertisements. His attention was fixed upon a certain slim figure in a gay print dress, who sat among the other female salesclerks near the entrance, looking wistful and slightly bored.

Gil Barclay released a long sigh. His life had never been too complete, but now he realized that it lacked a vitally necessary thing.

Becoming aware that his rapt attitude was drawing amused notice from passersby, Gil moved away from



He appeared to be hesitant as the girl suggested that they take a trial flight in the rocket.

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the window. He took several hesitant steps along the pedestrian bridge, fighting a mental battle. Then his shoulders squared with determination. Straightening his tie and adjusting the angle of his hat, he strode into the salesroom.

He ignored the other salesgirls, each of whom tried with bright smiles to attract his attention, and went to the chair in which the girl in the print dress was sitting. The beat of his heart quickened.

When she noticed Gil's approach, the girl rose from the chair, a smile coming to her lips. It was a shy, twisted smile, and Gil thought it quite fascinating.

She was small, but she filled out the print dress in a way that would have delighted its designer. Ash-blonde hair fell in soft curls about her vivid face. Her eyes were a clear gray and had warm lights in them.

"I am Miss Willard," she said. "May I help you?"

Gil tore his entranced gaze from her. He removed his hat and glanced in a business-like fashion at the skycars looming around him.

"Why, yes," he said. "I'm interested in buying a small ship. Something on the order of a two-passenger flitabout."

Miss Willard raised a slim hand to pat a few straying curls in place. The shyness of her smile seemed to have grown.

"There is the H-40 series," she said. "Economically priced, but fully equipped, and just as efficient in performance as the ships in the high price ranges. Will you please step this way?"

GIL FOLLOWED her across the great salesroom, to a section devoted entirely to H-40 skycars. He was conscious as he did so of the lilting grace with which she walked. Again he was aware of the deficiency in his life. Only Miss Willard, he knew, could supply what was needed.

"This is Model A," she said, gesturing toward a small ship with a maroon and silver finish. "It is the lowest in price of the H-40 series, and includes every convenience—heating unit, television receiver, and air conditioner. The seats have heavy-duty, hyper-steel acceleration springs, and the permoleum upholstery is guaranteed to last the life of the ship."

Gil studied the skycar with a reflective frown. He walked around it musingly, taking in every line and angle. He rubbed his chin in deep concentration.

"There are other models in an ascending price range," Miss Willard said helpfully. "Would you care to see them?"

"I think this model is quite satisfactory," Gil said. After all, he thought, Miss Willard was the only model he was interested in. It would not be fair to keep leading her on.

"Here," she said. "You can step inside and look around." She had some difficulty in pulling open the door.

Gil hurried to her side. "Allow me." He tugged powerfully at the door, which opened so promptly and smoothly that he fell sprawling. He picked himself up from the floor with a rueful grin.

Miss Willard was sympathetic, but her gray eyes held a suspicious twinkle. "I'm so sorry," she said. "Did you hurt yourself?"

"Not a bit," he assured her. But he rubbed the seat of his trousers gently and there was a certain stiffness in the way he stood.

They entered the cabin, where Gil quickly discovered two things. The first was that Miss Willard barely reached to his chin. The second was

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that he could not stand entirely upright. His head rang from the blow it had received on the low ceiling.

He sank into one of the two thickly upholstered seats and soothed his bruises. Miss Willard, who had now developed a sudden cough along with the odd brightness in her gray eyes, began to demonstrate the comforts and refinements of the Verdman H-40, Model A skycar. While she ran the gamut of adjectives and technical terms, Gil absorbed himself in a study of her features. They had, he decided critically, been assembled with an astonishing degree of skill.

"A baby could operate this ship," concluded Miss Willard. She glanced expectantly at Gil, evidently having run out of anything further to say.

He pulled himself back to reality with an effort. "Oh...er...yes. This certainly is a nice little ship." He hesitated and looked doubtful. "But I'm afraid I couldn't reach a decision just by knowing what all the different gadgets do. It would be necessary for me to see the ship in actual operation first."

"I'll be glad to take you up for a demonstration flight," Miss Willard said.

This was more than Gil had hoped for. "That'll be fine," he said. He kept himself from shouting with admirable restraint.

"Excuse me, then. I'll have the ship run up to the roof, and in the meantime I'll put on my flying outfit."

While Miss Willard went away to make the necessary arrangements, Gil sat down in a lounge chair and lighted a cigarette. He was beginning to feel guilty. What would the girl say when she learned that he was merely stringing her along? He certainly couldn't afford to buy the ship, nor was he even remotely interested in buying it.

Thus far, he realized, Fate had beamed on him. She had introduced him to his ideal and furnished conditions for a quick acquaintance. But he didn't know how long his luck would last. Fate, as Gil well knew, was a fickle creature.

A RUMBLE broke into his musings. He looked up to see the platform upon which the Model A skycar stood begin rising toward the ceiling. A rectangular opening gaped, and both ship and platform disappeared inside. A few moments later Miss Willard returned, wearing a snug-fitting plastolon flying jacket and cap.

"This way," she said. "We'll have to take the elevator up to the roof."

"Would you mind telling me your first name?" Gil asked as they rode upward.

She shook her head and smiled. "It's Joan," she said.

"A lovely name," Gil said. "Do you mind if I call you Joan?"

"Not during working hours, please. The management frowns upon any familiarity between its salesladies and gentlemen customers."

"I won't, then—during working hours." He grinned at her, elated by the invitation that had been in her words. "My name is Gil," he added. "Gil—"

He broke off. He studied the hat in his hands with a suddenly pained expression.

Miss Willard glanced at him puzzledly, but in another moment the elevator reached the roof landing field, and the incident passed.

They strode across the sun-splashed field and entered the skycar, which mechanics had already fueled and checked. Miss Willard's slim fingers moved deftly over the controls. The little craft shuddered and roared as flame shot from the jets. It darted into the bright sky and

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rose swiftly.

Gil pretended to listen intently as the girl launched into a salestalk designed to convince him that the skycar was a mechanical marvel.

"Note the improvement in the control board instruments," she pointed out. "The concave design provides clear visibility from any angle. And note the absence of the usual clumsy accelerator lever. It isn't necessary to learn to grade the blast any longer. All you have to do now is touch this series of buttons."

Gil nodded. "Clever," he agreed.

"And note how sweetly the ship handles. No vibration whatever. Just like floating."

She ceased speaking to let Gil get the effect. He nodded shrewdly to show that he did. Miss Willard was visibly pleased.

"What is the ship's ceiling?" asked Gil.

"About thirty miles. But theoretically the Model A has the power and insulation to go much higher than that. If there were enough fuel, I'm sure we could go clear to the moon."

"I wish we could," Gil said, his tone wistful.

"It will be done soon," Miss Willard said. "The Verdman fission reactor engine is now being adapted for that purpose by the Army's rocket branch."

"The Verdman fission reactor engine," Gil said. He glanced away from Miss Willard, and his mouth twisted into a bitter line.

"A remarkable invention," Miss Willard said. "The engine made it possible to use atomic energy in aircraft and in so many other ways that it caused a world-wide revolution and made atomic energy control by government no longer necessary."

"Yes," Gil said. "Would you mind turning on the television set? I'd like to see how it works at this height."

A faint perplexity clouding her face, Miss Willard complied. Music came from the compact set, and an orchestra came into focus.

"It also has a sending unit," the girl said, returning to her sales campaign.

From the television set came a sudden crackling noise, followed by a deafening blare. The screen went blank.

MISS WILLARD smiled reassuringly at Gil. "Something seems to need adjusting," she said. She fiddled with the dials and switches, but obtained no response. At last she removed a panel and glanced inside. "Something seems to have short-circuited," she decided. "The result of faulty installation, I suppose. Some mechanic is going to get a lecture for this."

They were still ascending, but swiftly approaching the limit of the ship's ceiling. The cabin was growing cold.

"I'll switch on the heating unit," Miss Willard said. "And I guess I ought to start the air conditioner, too." She busied herself for a moment and then turned back to Gil. "Well, what do you think of the ship?"

"Not bad. It seems to be all that you say it is."

"I assure you that this is the most economical and serviceable skycar on the market."

Just then the cabin lights began to flash on and off in a crazy sort of code. For about three seconds they put on a good imitation of an upper level zeon sign—and then they went out completely.

"Oh!" Miss Willard said.

"Stay where you are," Gil said. "I'll see if I can find what the trouble is."

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He tried—for fifteen laborious minutes. He traced what seemed thousands of wires through every nook and cranny of the cabin before he found the connection that had been shaken apart. He returned to his chair, breathing hard. The cabin had become stiflingly hot, and his clothing was damp with perspiration.

"The heating unit," he said. "It seems to be somewhat too enthusiastic."

"Why, yes, it does," Miss Willard said. She had removed her cap and opened her jacket. "I guess I had better turn it down."

She turned it down—but the heating unit proved obstinate. It continued to deliver heat with great vigor.

"I think it would be a good idea to turn it off," Gil said.

Miss Willard nodded unhappily. "Yes."

Gil was deeply reflective. "Er... the air conditioner. How much confidence do you have in it?"

"It's the most efficient on the market." But she, too, seemed to have become reflective.

"I guess we ought to be getting back," Gil said. "I...you see, I have some important business to take care of this afternoon."

Miss Willard glanced at him in dismay. "Then you aren't interested in buying the skycar?"

"Uh...it isn't that. But I would like to think it over a bit more."

Miss Willard suddenly looked very small, young and dejected. She took her lower lip between her teeth and blinked her eyes quickly.

Gil felt a sudden aching sympathy. He wanted to take Miss Willard in his arms and comfort her, but he doubted that anything less than the outright purchase of the skycar would be effective.

After a moment the girl pulled her-

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self together and manipulated the skycar controls for the return trip. But Fate, of whose machinations Gil was justly wary, decreed otherwise.

The rushing murmur of the jets abruptly rose to a bellow. They thundered in wild disharmony, filling the cabin with an unpleasant and alarming vibration.

"Oh, Lord!" Gil said.

Then the next blow struck.

The cacophony of the jets exploded in a violent roar. Gil and the girl were hurled back into their seats by a mighty force. In the next instant they were conscious of nothing at all.

With the escape velocity imparted to it by the blast, the skycar sped eagerly away from earth and in the general direction of the moon.

WHEN GIL regained his senses, he found the interior of the cabin ominously quiet. The skycar's propulsion engine seemed no longer in operation. Either it had been damaged, or all the fuel had been consumed.

He rubbed his aching head and discovered that he felt bruised and weak. Then he remembered Miss Willard. He turned to where she sat slumped in her seat and began chafing her wrists.

Presently she stirred. Her eyes opened and looked at Gil and frightened awareness came into them.

"The engine!" she said. "Something happened to it."

Gil nodded. "Weak alloys, I guess. They'd have to be weak in order to turn out a cheap skycar. The heat was too much for them."

"Where are we?"

"So far up that I'd prefer not to think about it. We...it looks like we're headed for the moon."

Miss Willard covered her face with her hands. Her slim shoulders shook.

"Darned flying junkpile!" she said. "I knew Verdman skycars weren't any good, but I had to have a job."

Gil patted her shoulder awkwardly. "Please don't take it so hard. I know we're in a tight spot, but tears won't help any."

"It...it isn't that. It's having everything go wrong just...just when we were getting acquainted."

"Why, Miss Willard!" Gil said. "Do you mean that?"

She nodded miserably. "I...I was hoping to sell you the skycar, but I went through my salestalk routine mostly to pass the time."

"You know, I wanted to get acquainted with you, too," Gil admitted.

"You can call me Joan," she said. "Even during working hours. The management can go jump into an atom."

"Joan, I have a confession to make," Gil said. "You see, I never actually intended to buy the skycar. I just wanted to meet you."

She stared at him. "Then you were just leading me on? Do you realize that we wouldn't be in this mess if you hadn't done that?"

"I know, Joan. I'm sorry."

"Sorry! That certainly won't do any good now."

He turned miserably from her accusing eyes and looked at the control board. The dials and gauges told him nothing. Their delicate mechanisms had apparently been thrown out of order by the explosion, and he could not tell how far into space the skycar had gone.

He peered out through the curving viewport and gasped at what he saw. The earth was convex and hazy far above him. The moon was a huge silver-gray ball. Everywhere else was a deep blackness, sprinkled with frosty stars.

"Joan!" he said. "Are you sure that

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this ship is air-tight?"

"That's what I was told to say," she answered coldly. "You had better hope that it is."

"Please don't be angry, Joan. What happened isn't entirely my fault. Verdman should have put out a better ship. And if we must die, let's not do it quarreling with each other."

HER FEATURES softened. "You are right... Gil. I guess I've been acting like a silly fool After all, I could have gotten into a situation like this with any other prospective buyer." She smiled shyly and hesitated. "But I'm glad it was with you."

He gazed at her in surprised delight, then reached eagerly for her hands. But to his amazement he found the girl in his arms.

Some time later she said, "We seem to be forgetting that we're in a terrible jam. Not that I wouldn't like to forget. But don't you think we ought to see if there isn't something we can do?"

"You're right," he said. "Let's take stock of our resources." He peered once more at the control board. "I guess there's no hope where the engine is concerned."

The girl moved various switches and levers. After a moment she shook her head gravely.

"I'm afraid not," she said.

"What about the sending unit?"

She stared at him for a breathless instant. Then she turned eagerly to the apparatus.

There was no response.

Gil probed into the vitals of the sending unit and sighed. "Damaged," he said. "The set wasn't built to take a lot of strain."

"Can't...can't it be repaired?"

"Maybe—if we had the tools and spare parts."

"Yes—if."

"There aren't any?"

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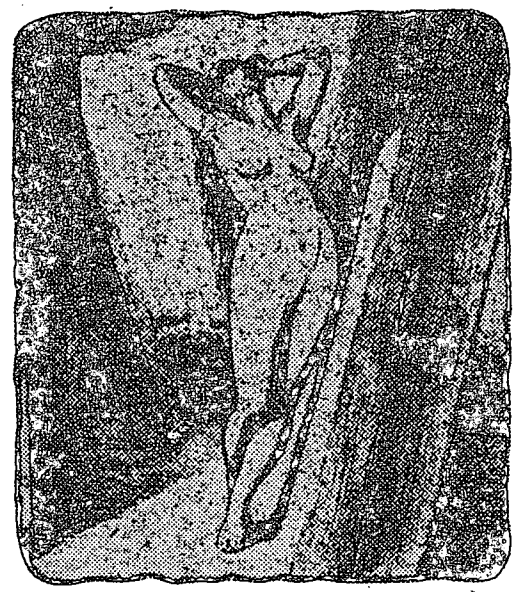

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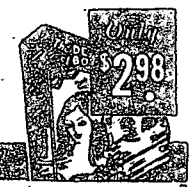

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"No."

Gil shrugged. "Anyway, I don't think sending a distress call back to Earth would have done us any good. They'd have to get a special rocket ready in order to get up where we are, and by that time it would be too late."

With a growing fatalism he turned his attention to the compartments at the rear of the cabin. One contained a pair of pressurized high altitude suits, with parachutes attached. Hope stirred in Gil as he surveyed them, but after a moment he shook his head.

"We're too high up," he said. "These suits weren't made for the kind of a drop we'd have to take—even if we could stand it."

Another compartment brought to light the air conditioning apparatus, along with a spare tank of oxygen. Gil studied the reading on the indicator of the cylinder currently in use and shook his head again. The oxygen supply wouldn't last long.

The remaining compartment swung outward to reveal a snack bar. This contained several assorted packages of concentrated foods, and a spigot from which came tepid water.

"The food is used chiefly for display purposes," Joan said. "It'll come in handy now—but there's so pitifully little of it."

"It'll last a few days anyway," Gil said. "That's as long as the air will hold out."

"And after that?"

"We'll worry about it when the time comes."

He turned away to hide his bitterness. He knew already what the end would be. It was ironical that the happiness he had found should be so brief.

There was nothing else in the compartments which might offer a way out of their predicament. They returned to their seats and gazed broodingly at the bright sphere of the moon. It had grown larger.

GIL FELT Joan's hand creep into his, like the hand of a child, frightened and lost, seeking reassurance. He held it tightly, and somehow the simple action abruptly made stark and poignant the dilemma in which he and the girl had been caught. It had seemed oddly unreal a moment before, something happening to another person. But now full, chilling awareness swept him, bringing a vivid sense of doom.

He couldn't die now, he told himself. Not when he had found so much to live for. There had to be a way out. There had to be something he could do.

And suddenly, with a kind of anguished desperation, he wished he had tools. He wished—

His mind seemed to swoop, to focus like a beam of intense light, illumining a single dominant thought.

The laboratory! If only he were somehow able to reach it! In the laboratory were the tools and machinery and the dozen other items he so desperately needed. Most important of all, in the laboratory was the degravity engine upon which he had spent almost three years of work.

The thought faded under a surge of futility. For the degravity engine didn't function yet. He didn't know if it ever would.

The principle was all right, as was the mathematics behind it. He had checked often enough not to have any doubts. But somehow the degravity engine refused to take on material form.

His thoughts sharpening once more, he began going over the problem. His mind had never seemed so vivid and clear. It went with astonishing ease over the complex scientific pattern which was the foundation

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of his device, seeking flaws.

He did not at the moment concern himself with the question of why his mind should operate with such unusual efficiency. Had he done so, he might have guessed that the skycar's distance from the Earth might have something to do with it. He might even have reached the full explanation—that in space, freed from the handicaps of gravity and atmospheric pressure under which it functions on Earth, the human brain develops abnormal powers.

He did not realize this. Instead he discovered what had been wrong with the degravity engine.

It was a simple detail, the sort of thing that escapes even the most careful examination. Ten minutes of work would have corrected it.

There was only one difficulty. He wasn't in his laboratory—he was in a skycar, out in space, destined for certain death.

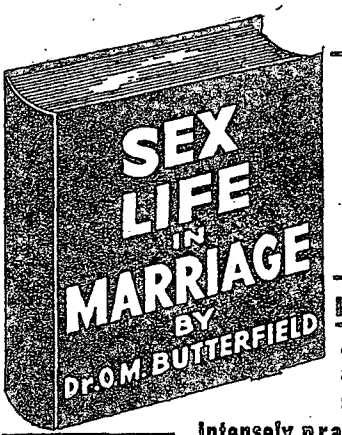
The reminder shocked him out of his reverie. He straightened in his chair and glanced at Joan. She had fallen into a doze. He had been lost in thought for some time, it seemed.

He rose and began restlessly to pace the tiny cabin. He had to stoop to keep his head from hitting the ceiling, and before long that made his back ache.

Then he became aware of another source of discomfort. His lungs were beginning to labor. It struck him as queer, for his pacing could hardly be much of a drain on his wind. In the next instant a chill dismay struck him as he realized the answer.

The precious, life-sustaining air was leaking from the skycar!

It was the one, final thing needed to make the situation completely impossible. There was a grim, tragic humor in it. He laughed mirthlessly, almost with hysteria, then glanced quickly at Joan to see if he had awak-



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ened her. But she was still asleep.

HE STUDIED the indicator of the oxygen cylinder currently in use and returned to his chair. He had the hope rather than the certainty that the air in the cabin would be conserved by remaining still. He sat with his elbows on his knees, staring miserably at the floor, his hands twisting and clenching.

When it grew too difficult to breathe, he adjusted the controls of the air conditioning apparatus to restore the air content to a comfortable minimum. He knew now that he had been too optimistic in his remark to Joan that the air would last a few days. With the drain now being made on it, the air would be gone in less than half that time.

He decided not to tell Joan. When she noticed the thinness of the air, he would merely explain that he had turned down the air conditioning apparatus to conserve oxygen. And grimly he determined not to wait the last horrible, strangling minutes until the end. Before that happened, and before Joan knew what he intended, he would open the airlock so that death would be swifter and less painful.

In the adjoining seat Joan stirred. "Gil...?"

"Yes?"

"Did you call me?" She smiled and stretched.

"Why, no—but I was thinking of you."

"It somehow seems that you called me.... Kiss me, Gil—and don't let me sleep again."

He kissed her. As he held her tightly against him, he heard her speak again, very softly, yet with an odd distinctness.

"Oh, Gil, how I wish we could have years to spend together instead of just a few days!"

A few days, he thought bitterly. Joan didn't know they had only hours left, what with the air leaking from the ship.

Abruptly she pulled away from him. "Gil! The air is leaking?"

"Of course not," he said quickly. "What makes you think—?"

"I just heard you say so."

"But I didn't say anything!" And then he realized that Joan hadn't spoken either when she had voiced her plea for time. Yet he had understood—just as she had understood his own unspoken thought regarding the air. In the next instant the explanation came to him. They were in some inexplicable fashion reading each other's mind!

"The air is leaking, Gil!" Joan insisted. "I...I *know* it is!"

He nodded gravely. "I'm sorry, Joan."

"Then we have...less than a day left?"

He nodded again. A belated amazement surged through him. Mind reading! Telepathy! What had happened to them? They hadn't been capable of mental contact before.

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Nor did this seem to be the only mysteriously acquired ability. He recalled how easily he had been able to review the intricate mass of data behind the degravity engine and discover the flaw that had kept it from completion.

"Telepathy?" Joan said. "Degravity engine? Gil—what is all this?"

He explained, not using his voice. It was inevitable, considering the means of communication, that more should be revealed than he had intended.

"Gil Barclay!" Joan gasped. "You...you're Gil Barclay!"

He sighed. "Yes."

"I should have guessed it," she went on. "There was something familiar about your face that I couldn't explain. And you omitted mentioning your last name. I remember thinking that it was strange."

"If I had told you, it would have seemed a lot stranger that I should be interested in buying a Verdman skycar," he said with a wry grin.

She studied him wonderingly. "Gil, is it true that Verdman cheated you out of the fission reactor engine?"

"It's true, all right. I worked for him once, you know, as a technician in his company's nuclear research department. That was after most of the industrial applications of atomic energy had been turned over to private development. But all my work on the fission reactor engine was done after I had left Verdman. Still he claimed all rights to it, because of an agreement I'd signed giving him ownership of any inventions I made within three years from the date of my leaving the company."

HE MADE an angry gesture. "It was a rotten trick. I never knew I'd signed such an agreement. I'd cer-

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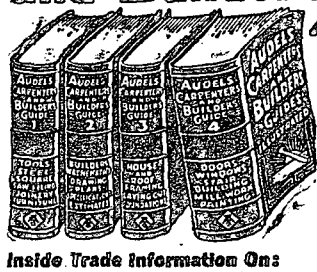

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tainly never have done so if I'd known what it was all about. Experienced technicians were hard to find in those days, and I could have had my pick of jobs and contracts without having to sign away all my ideas for three years."

"How did you happen to sign in the first place?" Joan asked.

"Verdman tricked me. The research we did was still under government supervision then, you know. We had to fill out all sorts of forms almost every day, forms covering the type and amount of nuclear materials used, the details of how they were used, what finally became of them, and things like that. We signed reams of affidavits and reports and vouchers. Just routine. After a while none of us paid any attention to them. We just signed whatever was handed to us.

"That's how I signed the agreement. Verdman later claimed that the signing of such agreements was a standard procedure, the idea being that any inventions produced by former employees were most likely thought up on company property and time, and built as a result of the knowledge and skills acquired in using company equipment and material. He had other signed agreements as proof—signed by paid stooges, or by men who hadn't known what they were doing at the time, and who had to testify in his favor to get out of it."

A bleak smile of recollection touched Gil's lips. "I lost the case, of course. I didn't have the money to carry on a court fight indefinitely, and Verdman did. But I put up a battle he most probably hasn't forgotten yet."

"You did, Gil," Joan said softly. "I still remember it."

"But I lost," he said. "I guess I was

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out of my head for a while. I even thought of murdering Verdman—especially after the first skycars with my engine appeared on the market. Then I found a better way to get revenge on him. That was to put out another engine, one even cheaper and safer than the fission reactor.

"It took three years, and it lead to the degravity engine. Only it didn't work—that is, until just a while ago. I found out what was wrong while you were asleep, Joan. There's something about being this far out into space that stimulates the brain—or whatever it does. That's evidently why we can read each other's mind."

"I'd been wondering about that," Joan said. "It should seem thrilling and incredible, but somehow it just doesn't." And without using her voice she added, "Not even being in love with you, Gil. It's as though I've been in love with you for a long time...."

His answer was equally silent, but just as clearly understood.

Later he sat holding her in his arms and thinking, with the uncanny vigor and clarity that had come to him, of the degravity engine. In his mind he visualized how it would be situated in the ship, where the electrodes and connections would go, and where the control mechanism would be placed. He imagined how the ship would move, easily, smoothly, and with a complete absence of sound.

IT MADE A beautiful picture. What marred it was the fact that the degravity engine was thousands of miles away, unfinished as yet, and forever beyond reach.

He would not have his revenge on Verdman. He did not even have much longer to live.

Joan moved in his arms. "Gil...

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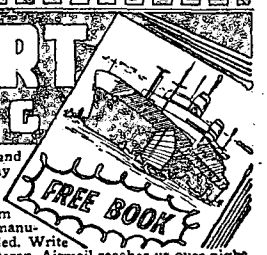

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I've noticed it, too. The air is almost gone."

"We'll be able to hold out a while longer."

"Not very long, Gil. And then we open the airlock, don't we? I know what you've been thinking."

She turned her head to gaze out through the viewport above the control board. "It's beautiful out there, Gil.... Stars and more stars, until it seems you can lose yourself just by looking at them. Why should we die with walls around us? Why not step out of the airlock...hand in hand?"

"Yes, that's the way to do it—the way we will do it."

And then she was pointing. "Gil—what is that? I've never noticed it on the control board before."

He followed the direction of her finger. He stared.

He was looking at the control mechanism of the degravity engine!

"It can't be real!" he gasped. "It's an illusion. It has to be!"

But the control mechanism, when he slowly reached out to touch it, proved unaccountably real. In a fever of excitement he began hurrying about the cabin.

"The engine...the electrodes—they're here! Everything's here! But how? How?"

Joan's eyes were wide and dark. "Telepathy isn't the only power we've acquired, it seems."

He nodded solemnly, awe like a soft golden radiance in his mind. "We can create, too...like gods. But, Joan, does the engine really work? Will the ship move?"

Slowly he returned to the control board, dreading, almost certain that he was living a dream and was due at any instant to awaken to bitter disappointment.

The degravity engine worked. The

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ship moved. It moved easily, smoothly, and with a complete absence of sound.

"We're going back," Gil said, when he could think again with the necessary degree of sanity and coherence. "Going home, Joan...."

Her answering thought held a note of laughter—and a fading echo of hysteria. "But first, Gil, don't you think you ought to plug the leaks in the ship? We could use some air, too. And food. A real banquet, Gil."

"Coming up!" he said.

"And while you're at it," she went on, "I'm going to see if I can't think up a wedding dress—a dress so lovely that no designer would have been able to create it otherwise.... I wonder if I can—I mean, actually create a dress like that, a dress as real as your engine...."

She could—and she did. And Gil agreed with her that it was a perfectly exquisite dress.

THE END

"COLD" WAR

By A. MORRIS

THE PHRASE "cold war" is often used half humorously to describe our relations with the nations behind the Iron curtain. But there is a spot on this Earth where the expression is no joking matter. Everyone knows that the United States and Canada are both conducting military maneuvers and research in the frozen Arctic wastes of northern Canada, Alaska, and the other frigid territories that border the North American continent. And those affairs are rough!

The problem of living and moving around in temperatures so low that running engines freeze is gradually being licked, but only very slowly. It is said that the Russians are years ahead of us on this score—but any advantage they may have will be only temporary.

Keeping men alive and warm and able to work and fight at sub-zero temperatures is a problem now being licked. Loose, many-layered clothing, snow goggles, wind masks, heavy caloric diets, frequent medicals—all serve to keep men in tip-top shape. But

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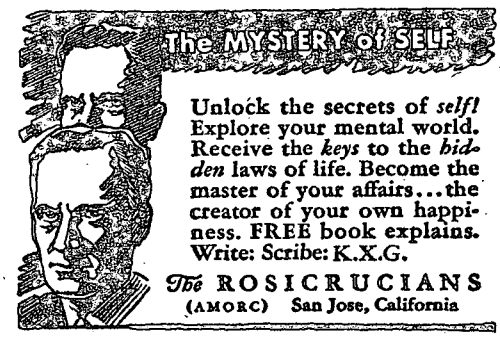

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vehicles—the second most important item—ah, that's a job. To begin with, there is the problem of lubrication. Conventional lubricants, ordinary oils, thinned to water consistency become viscous and eventually freeze. Thus the engines lock up. While the silicones, and fluorocarbon oils offer great promise, as yet they are still experimental, so the old-fashioned method of pre-heating the engines thoroughly with hot-air must be used. Then when the engine is finally warmed up, it must be kept running. Standard radiators must be blocked off and the engines must be kept operating lest they simply give up the ghost and freeze solid.

This is true of car, truck and aircraft internal combustion machines. Gas turbines, and jet engines considerably ease this almost impossible problem. They start and run without too much trouble, although usually more volatile gasoline must be used in kerosene burning machines—at least at the start. Then because these engines throw off a great deal of heat there is not too much of a lubrication problem.

Because ice forms everywhere, aircraft, even jets, must have innumerable ducts carrying intense blasts of hot gases to wing-edges, to all sorts of electrical mechanisms, to the heating system in general.

Bad as the situation is, it is being licked. Toynbee points out that the Eskimo civilization never reached a very developed peak—became static indeed—primarily because of the hard, merciless cruelty of the Arctic. But now, men from temperate climates, are devoting their energies and resources to conquering these obstacles. There is no doubt but that they'll succeed. When one speaks of warfare in the Arctic, it is not meant in the conventional static sense. Soldiers in the Arctic will be less concerned with fighting than with maintaining aircraft stations and radar posts. Any fighting that may be done, will of necessity have to be done in vehicles—tanks or trucks or the like—men cannot live in such barren regions without shelter, no matter how ruggedly they may have been trained.

In its own limited way, a very limited way, of course, experience gained in supplying the Arctic soldiers, is sort of a measure of the technique necessary to supply extra-terrestrial expeditions. On Mars, say, as in the Arctic, the barrenness of the terrain, the lack of man-made installations, the challenge to survival—all are obstacles which must be surmounted. As technology progresses, we can very well see that the introduction of the rocket and the guided missile will almost duplicate this interplanetary experience.

The most interesting thing to note about the whole thing, is that, as is so often the case, technology advances in relatively small steps, each subsequent depending a good deal, on the ones preceding it.

The cold war—especially in the Arctic—is preparation, in its way, for the greater things to come.

THE END

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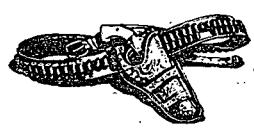

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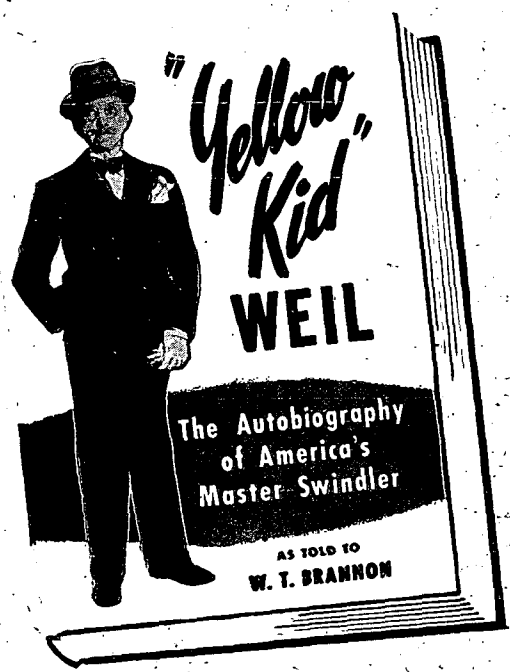

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